



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

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	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	09/28 Day 217 of the Russia invasion 09/28 Russia: campaign until all Donetsk captured 09/28 EU vows to protect energy systems 09/28 NKorea fires 3rd ballistic missile into sea 09/28 Iran protests link to history of resistance 09/28 Iran in new Iraq drone bombing campaign 09/28 Cleric supporters storm Baghdad govt. area 09/27 Military forces, draft notices at border 09/27 Russians at Georgia border flee draft 09/27 Russians flee to Kazakhstan; nearly 100K 09/27 Russia prepares to annex parts of Ukraine 09/27 Ukraine pushes deeper into Donetsk region 09/27 Russia control of Ukraine airspace a failure 09/27 CIA warned of potential pipeline attacks 09/27 Officials: pipeline breaks look 'deliberate' 09/27 Sabotage? Gas leaks pour into Baltic Sea 09/27 India bans Muslim group for 5yrs. 09/27 Saudi Arabia names new prime minister 09/27 Cuba power grid fails in wake Hurricane Ian	09/28 Hurricane Ian nears historic Cat 5 status 09/28 Ian nearing Florida intensifies Cat 4 storm 09/28 Florida Keys begin to feel storm's effects 09/27 Dramatic drop in monkeypox cases 09/27 New UK Covid wave a warning for US? 09/27 No dramatic rise Covid cases in schools 09/27 Inflation hit tenants hard; landlords? 09/27 GM backpedals return-to-office plan 09/27 Home prices first monthly decline in years 09/27 US maintains current cap on refugees 09/27 Fla. evacuation orders ahead of Ian landfall 09/27 Florida's low-lying Gulf Coast braces for Ian 09/26 BA.2.75.2 'most resistant' variant to date	09/27 Eastside Fire not rehiring let-go firefighters 09/27 Seattle Children's 'unprecedented demand' 09/27 Seattle-area home prices take a tumble 09/27 Protesters decry CID 'homeless megaplex' 09/27 Mayor's budget expands Seattle PD funding 09/27 King Co. budget shortfalls; plan: raise taxes 09/27 New agency to probe police deadly force 09/27 WSP apologizes after I-90 closure debacle 09/27 Skykomish businesses struggle amidst fire 09/27 Highway 2 closes again because of wildfire 09/27 Spokane area tops record heat temperature
Cyber, Tech Awareness Go to articles	09/28 New 'Bl00Dy' ransomware gang in attacks 09/27 Dire warnings in Lapsus\$ hacker joyride 09/27 Fake dating, porn sites rack up \$millions 09/27 Crowdsourcing effort to identify Metador 09/27 FBI assists Australia in Optus data breach 09/27 Meta scrubs Russia network fake accounts 09/27 'NullMixer' dozen different malware families	09/27 Bogus CloudFlare DDoS captcha 09/27 Stolen identities in deepfake scams 09/27 Electronics, defense tech firm breached 09/27 Meta: China effort influence US elections 09/27 Phishing campaign using Microsoft Sway 09/27 Media company hacked to push racist texts	
Terrorism, Extremism Go to articles	09/28 Deadly militant attack Burkina Faso 09/28 Belgium police raid on extremists: 1 dead 09/28 NATO report: Pakistan, Taliban narco-trade 09/27 UK official: 32 terror plots foiled since 2017	09/27 FBI ongoing Afghan vetting problems? 09/27 Notorious ISIS 'Beatle' avoids supermax 09/27 ISIS: lone-wolf attacks to spark US civil war	
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	09/28 'Disastrous' 2022 melt of Swiss glaciers 09/28 Report: half of world bird species in decline		09/27 Survey: 37% adults strong feelings Seattle
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	09/27 Clues, stories Ukraine mass graves tell	09/28 DEA: fake pills w/fentanyl drive OD deaths 09/27 Judge sentences Capitol rioter to 7yrs 09/27 Escape: serving life for deadly bombing 09/27 High school football players shot, 1 dead 09/27 Guilty pleas: submarine secrets sale case 09/27 Libraries across US receive violent threats 09/27 Ex-Army reservist guilty: China agent	09/27 King Co. approves hate-crime hotline 09/27 Seattle Pioneer Square shooting: 1 injured 09/27 Grays Harbor Co. fire station \$90K burglary 09/27 Arrest: suspect SR900 rock throwing at cars

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Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/28 Hurricane Ian nears historic Cat 5 status
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2022/09/28/hurricane-ian-live-updates-tracker-path-forecast/10447576002/
GIST	Hurricane Ian strengthened into an "extremely dangerous" Category 4 storm Wednesday and roared to the brink of Category 5 status, its maximum sustained winds blasting at 155 mph as the west coast of Florida braced for landfall Wednesday afternoon.

[AccuWeather](#) forecasters predicted landfall just northwest of Fort Myers, between Don Pedro Island and Boca Grande, around 4 p.m. It will slam much of the state with [life-threatening storm surge, catastrophic winds and flooding](#), the National Hurricane Center said. At 7 a.m., the center of Ian was located 65 miles west-southwest of Naples.

"We are now forecasting a catastrophic storm surge of 12 to 16 feet from Englewood to Bonita Beach," the hurricane center advisory warned.

Almost 90,000 homes and businesses in South Florida already were dark early Wednesday, according to the tracking website [poweroutage.us](#). Power outages can be expected statewide, Florida Power & Light warned.

Tornadoes also were a risk, and warnings and watches were issued as rain bands began sweeping across the state.

Ian's stunning wind speeds were within 2 mph of Category 5, the highest status on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale.

"It is a big storm, it is going to kick up a lot of water as it comes in," Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said in Sarasota, a coastal city of 57,000 in the storm's projected path. "This the kind of storm surge that is life threatening."

Heavy rains, flooding to spread into Georgia, South Carolina

Heavy rainfall will spread across the Florida peninsula through Thursday. Widespread, prolonged major and record river flooding is expected across central Florida, the weather service said. The water woes will reach portions of the Southeast U.S. later this week and this weekend.

"Widespread, life-threatening catastrophic flooding is expected across portions of central Florida with considerable flooding in southern Florida, northern Florida, southeastern Georgia and coastal South Carolina," the service said in an advisory.

Airports, theme parks brace for storm

Airports in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Key West were closed Wednesday. Orlando International was scheduled to shut down at 10:30 a.m., and at least 700 flights in and out were canceled by early Wednesday. Disney World theme parks and Sea World in Orlando all closed ahead of the storm.

A couple from England on vacation in Tampa found themselves faced with riding out the storm at a shelter. Glyn and Christine Williams of London were told to leave their hotel near the beach when evacuations were ordered. Because the airport shut down, they could get no flight home.

"Unfortunately, all the hotels are full or closed, so it looks as though we're going to be in one of the shelters," Christine Williams said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/28 Russia: campaign until all Donetsk captured
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/kremlin-says-military-campaign-ukraine-continue-least-until-capture-all-donetsk-2022-09-28/
GIST	<p>MOSCOW, Sept 28 (Reuters) - The Kremlin said on Wednesday its "special military operation" in Ukraine must continue at least until the capture of all of east Ukraine's Donetsk region.</p> <p>In a call with reporters, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov noted that the self-styled Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) - a breakaway Russian-backed entity that has been fighting Ukrainian forces since 2014 - controls only part of the wider territory which it claims.</p> <p>Advertisement · Scroll to continue</p>

	<p>"Therefore it is necessary, as a minimum, to liberate the entire territory of the DPR," he said.</p> <p>Russia has framed its military campaign in Ukraine as necessary to protect Russian-speakers in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, of which Donetsk makes up half, from "genocide" by Ukraine. Both Kyiv and Western countries say this is a figleaf for an imperial-style land grab.</p> <p>Though Russia already controls almost all of Luhansk region, the other half of the Donbas, it holds only around 60% of Donetsk region.</p> <p>The Moscow-backed entities in Donetsk and Luhansk, alongside two other Russian-occupied regions in southern Ukraine, are seeking to become part of Russia after they completed on Tuesday what Kyiv and Western governments described as sham referendums on joining Russia.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/28 EU vows to protect energy systems
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/mystery-gas-leaks-hit-major-russian-undersea-gas-pipelines-europe-2022-09-27/
GIST	<p>BERLIN/COPENHAGEN, Sept 28 (Reuters) - Any deliberate disruption to the EU's energy infrastructure would meet a "robust and united response", its top diplomat said, after several states said two Russian pipelines to Europe that have been churning gas into the Baltic had been attacked.</p> <p>It remained far from clear who might be behind the leaks or any foul play, if proven, on the Nord Stream pipelines that Russia and European partners spent billions of dollars building.</p> <p>Russia, which slashed gas deliveries to Europe after the West imposed sanctions over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, has also said sabotage was a possibility and that the leaks undermined the continent's energy security.</p> <p>The European Union believes sabotage probably caused the leaks detected on Monday in the Nord Stream pipelines, Josep Borrell was reported as saying by German broadcaster ntv, echoing views aired by Germany, Denmark and Sweden on Tuesday.</p> <p>The EU has not named a potential perpetrator of the suspected sabotage or suggested a reason behind it.</p> <p>"Any deliberate disruption of European energy infrastructure is utterly unacceptable and will be met with a robust and united response," Borrell said, according to ntv.</p> <p>A statement issued by Russia's embassy in Denmark said that any sabotage on Nord Stream's pipelines was an attack on both Russia's and Europe's energy security.</p> <p>"The unsubstantiated accusations and assumptions that are now being made everywhere are intended to create information noise and prevent an objective and impartial investigation," Russia's statement said.</p> <p>Denmark's defence minister, meanwhile, said on Wednesday there was reason to be concerned about the security situation in the Baltic Sea region following a meeting with NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels.</p> <p>"Russia has a significant military presence in the Baltic Sea region and we expect them to continue their sabre-rattling," Morten Bodskov said in a statement.</p> <p>In a sign of how long it might take to ascertain the full extent of the damage and the cause of the leaks, Bodskov also said it might take a week or perhaps two before the areas around the damaged pipelines were calm enough to be investigated.</p>

The volume of gas leaking from the Nord Stream 1 pipeline was unchanged on Wednesday from the previous day, the Swedish Coast Guard said in an email to Reuters.

Denmark's armed forces said the largest gas leak caused a surface disturbance of well over 1 kilometre (0.6 mile) in diameter, while agencies issued warnings to shipping.

Sweden's Prosecution Authority said it will review material from a police investigation and decide on further action, after Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said on Tuesday that two blasts had been detected.

Although this did not represent an attack on Sweden, Stockholm was in close contact with partners such as NATO and neighbours such as Denmark and Germany, Andersson said.

Seismologists in Denmark and Sweden said they had registered two powerful blasts on Monday in the vicinity of the leaks and the explosions were in the water, not under the seabed.

The Nord Stream pipelines have been flashpoints in an escalating energy war between capitals in Europe and Moscow that has damaged major Western economies, sent gas prices soaring and sparked a hunt for alternative supplies.

Norwegian police said on Wednesday they have reinforced security around the country's oil and gas installations, while Danish authorities have asked that the level of preparedness in the country's power and gas sector be raised.

GAS FLOWS

Operator Nord Stream has called the damage "unprecedented", while Gazprom (GAZP.MM), the Russian-controlled company with a monopoly on its gas exports by pipeline, declined to comment.

Neither pipeline was pumping gas at the time the leaks were found, but the incidents scupper any remaining expectations that Europe could receive fuel via Nord Stream 1 before winter, while there are also concerns about gas piped via Ukraine.

"A development that could have a more immediate impact on gas supplies to Europe was a warning from Gazprom that Russia could impose sanctions on Ukraine's Naftogaz due to ongoing arbitration," analysts at ING Research said.

Naftogaz's CEO said on Wednesday the Ukrainian energy firm will continue with arbitration proceedings against Gazprom over Russian natural gas which transits the country.

Gazprom said earlier in the week that while rejecting all Naftogaz's claims in arbitration, it may introduce sanctions against the company in case it presses ahead with the case.

"The risk is that these flows come to a complete halt, which will only tighten up the European market further as we move towards the heating season," the ING analysts added.

European gas prices rose following news of the leaks. The benchmark October Dutch price was up by 11% at 204.50 euros/megawatt hour on Wednesday. Although prices are still below this year's peaks, they remain more than 200% higher than in early September 2021.

Russia reduced gas supplies to Europe via Nord Stream 1 before suspending flows altogether in August, blaming Western sanctions for causing technical difficulties. European politicians say that was a pretext to stop supplying gas.

The new Nord Stream 2 pipeline had yet to enter commercial operations. The plan to use it to supply gas was scrapped by Germany days before Russia sent troops into Ukraine, in what Moscow calls a "special military operation," in February.

HEADLINE	09/28 Iran protests link to history of resistance
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/iran-middle-east-religion-7de9a98cc304922098a62dc9223986ad?utm_source=homepage&utm_medium=TopNews&utm_campaign=position_06
GIST	<p>A young woman climbs to the top of a car in the middle of Mashhad, a conservative Iranian city famed for its Islamic shrines. She takes off her headscarf and starts chanting, “Death to the dictator!” Protesters nearby join in and cars honk in support.</p> <p>For many Iranian women, it’s an image that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago, said Fatemeh Shams, who grew up in Mashhad.</p> <p>“When you see Mashhad women coming to the streets and burning their veils publicly, this is really a revolutionary change. Iranian women are putting an end to a veiled society and the compulsory veil,” she said.</p> <p>Iran has seen multiple eruptions of protests over the past years, many of them fueled by anger over economic difficulties. But the new wave is showing fury against something at the heart of the identity of Iran’s cleric-led state: the compulsory veil.</p> <p>Iran’s Islamic Republic requires women to cover up in public, including wearing a “hijab” or headscarf that is supposed to completely hide the hair. Many Iranian women, especially in major cities, have long played a game of cat-and-mouse with authorities, with younger generations wearing loose scarves and outfits that push the boundaries of conservative dress.</p> <p>That game can end in tragedy. A 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Amini, was arrested by morality police in the capital Tehran and died in custody. Her death has sparked nearly two weeks of widespread unrest that has reached across Iran’s provinces and brought students, middle-class professionals and working-class men and women into the streets.</p> <p>Iranian state TV has suggested that at least 41 protesters and police have been killed. An Associated Press count of official statements by authorities tallied at least 13 dead, with more than 1,400 demonstrators arrested.</p> <p>A young woman in Tehran, who said she has continually participated in the past week’s protests in the capital city, said the violent response of security forces had largely reduced the size of demonstrations.</p> <p>“People still are coming to the streets to find one meter of space to shout their rage but they are immediately and violently chased, beaten and taken into custody, so they try to mobilize in four- to five-person groups and once they find an opportunity they run together and start to demonstrate,” she said, speaking on condition of anonymity.</p> <p>“The most important protest they (Iranian women) are doing right now is taking off their scarves and burning them,” she added. “This is a women’s movement first of all, and men are supporting them in the backline.”</p> <p>A writer and rights activist since her student days at Tehran University, Shams participated in the mass anti-government protests of 2009 before having to flee Iran.</p> <p>But this time is different, she said.</p> <p>Waves of violent repression against protests in the past 13 years “have disillusioned the traditional classes of society” that once were the backbone of the Islamic Republic, said Shams, who now lives in the United States.</p>

The fact that there have been protests in conservative cities like Mashhad or Qom — the historic center of Iran's clergy — is unprecedented, she said.

"Every morning I wake up and I think, is this actually happening? Women making bonfires with veils?"

Modern Iranian history has been full of unexpected twists and turns.

Iranian women who grew up before the overthrow of the monarchy in 1979 remember a country where women were largely free to choose how they dressed.

People of all stripes, from leftists to religious hardliners, participated in the revolution that toppled the shah. But in the end, it was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his followers who ended up seizing power and creating a Shiite cleric-led Islamic state.

On March 7, 1979, Khomeini announced that all women must wear hijab. The very next day — International Women's Day — tens of thousands of unveiled women marched in protest.

"It was really the first counter-revolutionary movement," said Susan Maybud, who participated in those marches and was then working as a news assistant with the foreign press. "It wasn't just about the hijab, because we knew what was next, taking away women's rights." She didn't even own a hijab at the time, she recalled.

"What you're seeing today is not something that just happened. There's been a long history of women protesting and defying authority" in Iran.

The hijab has been "the lightning rod of opposition," explained Roham Alvandi, an Iranian historian and associate professor at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

"It represents the ability of the Islamic Republic to reach down and control the most private and intimate aspects of Iranians' lives," he said.

A century or more ago, strict veiling was largely limited to Iran's upper classes. Most women were in rural areas and worked, "so hijab wasn't exactly possible" for them, said Esha Momeni, an Iranian activist and scholar affiliated with UCLA's Gender Studies Department.

Many women wore a "roosari" or casual headscarf that was "part of traditional clothing rather than having a very religious meaning to it."

Throughout the late 19th century, women were front-and-center in street protests, she said. In Iran's first democratic uprising of 1905, many towns and cities formed local women's rights committees.

This was followed by a period of top-down secularizing reforms under the military officer-turned-king Reza Shah, who banned the wearing of the veil in public in the 1930s.

During the Islamic Revolution, women's hijab became an important political symbol of the country "entering this new Islamic era," Momeni said. Growing up in Tehran, she remembers "living between two worlds" where family and friends didn't wear the veil at private gatherings but feared harassment or arrest by police or pro-government militias in public.

In 2008, Momeni was arrested and kept in solitary confinement for a month at Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, after working on a documentary about women activists and the 1 Million Signatures Campaign that aimed to reform discriminatory laws against women. She was later released and joined the 2009 "Green Movement" protests.

Like Shams, she sees today's wave of protests as shaking the foundations of the Islamic Republic.

“People are done with the hope of internal reform. People not wanting hijab is a sign of them wanting the system to change fundamentally,” Momeni said.

The 2009 protests were led by Iran’s “reformist” movement which called for a gradual opening-up of Iranian society. But none of Iran’s political parties — even the most progressive, reformist-led ones — supported abolishing the compulsory veil.

Shams, who grew up in relatively religious family and sometimes wore hijab, recounted how during the 2009 protests, she renounced the headscarf publicly. She found herself under attack by pro-government media, but also shunned by figures in the reform movement — and by her then-husband’s family.

“The major reason for our divorce was compulsory hijab,” she said.

As Iran has been besieged by U.S. sanctions and several waves of protests fueled by economic grievances, the leadership has grown insular and uncompromising.

In the 2021 presidential election, all serious contenders were disqualified to allow Ebrahim Raisi, a protégé of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, to take the presidency despite record low voter turnout.

The death of Mahsa Amini, who hailed from a relatively impoverished Kurdish area, has galvanized anger over forms of ethnic and social — as well as gender — discrimination, Shams said.

From Tehran’s universities to far-flung Kurdish towns, men and women protesters have chanted, “Whoever kills our sister, we will kill them.”

Shams says Iran’s rulers have backed themselves into a corner, where they fear yielding on the veil could endanger the 44-year-old Islamic Republic.

“There is no way back, at this point. If the Islamic Republic wants to stay in power, they have to abolish compulsory veiling, but in order to do that they have to transform their political ideology,” she said. “And the Islamic government is not ready for that change.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 New UK Covid wave a warning for US?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/27/health/uk-fall-wave-covid-us/index.html
GIST	<p>There are signs that the United Kingdom could be heading into a fall Covid-19 wave, and experts say the United States may not be far behind.</p> <p>A recent increase in Covid-19 cases in England doesn’t seem to be driven by a new coronavirus variant, at least for now, although several are gaining strength in the US and across the pond.</p> <p>“Generally, what happens in the UK is reflected about a month later in the US. I think this is what I’ve sort of been seeing,” said Dr. Tim Spector, professor of genetic epidemiology at Kings College London.</p> <p>Spector runs the Zoe Health Study, which uses an app to let people in the UK and US report their daily symptoms. If they start to feel bad, they take a home Covid-19 test and record those results. He says that about 500,000 people are currently logging their symptoms every day to help track trends in the pandemic.</p> <p>Spector says the study, which has been running since the days of the first lockdown in England in 2020, has accurately captured the start of each wave, and its numbers run about one to two weeks ahead of official government statistics.</p> <p>After seeing a downward trend for the past few weeks, the Zoe study saw a 30% increase in reported Covid-19 cases within the past week.</p>

“Our current data is definitely showing this is the beginning of the next wave,” Spector said.

On Friday, that increase was reflected in official UK government data too, although it was not as large as the increases reported by Zoe loggers.

[Data](#) from the National Health Service showed that after falling for nearly two months, the seven-day average of new cases in England and Wales rose 13% for the week ending September 17 over the week before. The seven-day average of hospitalizations was up 17% in the week ending September 19 compared with the week prior.

The data aligns with what models have predicted would happen in both the UK and the US.

“They predicted that we’d get a June to July peak and then there’d be a month where nothing happened in August and then it would flatten in in August and September and then start again in October. So it’s exactly matching what the modelers have have been predicting,” Spector said.

In the US, [some models](#) have predicted that Covid-19 cases will begin to rise again in October and continue to increase into the winter. Experts are hopeful that because most of the population now has some underlying immunity to the coronavirus, this wave would be less deadly than we’ve seen in previous winters.

Is this a blip or a wave?

It’s not clear what’s driving the increase in the UK or whether it will be sustained.

“These trends may continue for more than a week or two, or they may not,” said Kevin McConway, emeritus professor of applied statistics at the Open University in Milton Keynes, England.

Broken down by age, he says, there are clear increases among adolescents who are around middle school age and younger adults, those 25 through 34.

“It wouldn’t be surprising if there were some increase in infection as people come back from summer holidays and as the schools reopen,” McConway said in a statement to the nonprofit Science Media Centre. “Even if it is, there’s certainly no clear indication yet that it will continue.”

He’s not the only one who needs to see more data before calling this the start of a new wave.

“Question one is, how significant is that rise? Is it, for instance, the beginning of something, a new wave, or is this a temporary blip because of all of the getting together around the Queen’s funeral and other events that have been going on?” said Dr. Peter Hotez, who co-directs the Center for Vaccine Development at Texas Children’s Hospital in Houston.

A second important question will be whether the increase is being driven by a new variant.

“That’s the worst possible situation. Because historically, when that situation occurs in the UK, it’s reflected within a matter of weeks in the United States,” Hotez said. “That was true of the Alpha wave; that was true of the Delta wave; that was true of Omicron and its subvariants.”

The role of new variants

That’s where the US may catch a break this time around.

Instead of new variants, Christina Pagel, a professor of operational research at University College London, thinks cases are going up in the UK because of a combination of waning immunity and behavioral changes.

Many people in the UK are several months past their last Covid-19 booster or infection, and government [statistics show](#) that just 8% of adults 50 and older have gotten an Omicron-specific vaccine since the government started its fall vaccination campaign in September. School and work have fully resumed after the summer holidays, and people are spending more time indoors as the temperature drops.

Immunity is also waning in the United States, and Americans have also been slow to get boosted. Just 35% of those for whom a booster is recommended have had one, according to CDC data.

The updated boosters in the US are slightly different from the ones in the UK. The UK is using vaccines that have been updated to fight the original version of Omicron, which is not circulating anymore. US boosters have been updated to fight the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants, which are currently causing infections both here and abroad. It's not clear whether the strain differences will have an effect on cases or disease severity.

There are a mix of new variants – offshoots of BA.4 and BA.5 – that are waiting in the wings. They represent just a small proportion of total cases, but several are growing against BA.5, which is still dominating transmission.

“It is very likely that these will accelerate current increases and cause a substantial wave in October” in the UK, Pagel said in an email to CNN.

Other experts agree with that assessment.

“There is talk about a bunch of lineages with concerning mutations, including BA.2.75, BQ.1.1, etc, but none of these are of high enough frequency in the UK right now to be driving the change in cases,” Nathan Grubaugh, who studies the epidemiology of microbial diseases at the Yale School of Public Health, said in an email to CNN.

He says the mix of variants in the UK seems to be much the same as it is in the US, at least for now. “We are seeing the increase in many respiratory viruses right now in the US, so it's not a stretch to think that a new COVID wave (or ripple) will be coming soon,” he wrote.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/28 NKorea fires 3rd ballistic missile into sea
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/world/north-korea-fires-third-ballistic-missile-ahead-vp-harris-arrival-seoul
GIST	<p>North Korea fired a third ballistic missile into the sea on the eve of Vice President Kamala Harris' arrival in the South Korean capital Wednesday.</p> <p>Wednesday's missile is the latest show of force from Kim Jong Un's regime, which fired two previous missiles into the waters off its eastern coast on Saturday and Sunday. Harris is scheduled to arrive in Seoul on Thursday as the U.S. and South Korean militaries hold joint exercises in the region.</p> <p>Prior to Saturday's launch, North Korea had not fired a ballistic missile since June. The pattern echoes that of President Biden's last trip to South Korea, which also saw the North firing a trio of missiles days before his arrival.</p> <p>Harris will meet with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Thursday, the final day of joint military exercises.</p> <p>The USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier first arrived in South Korea on Saturday to participate in the drills, sending a message both to North Korea and China with regard to its aggression toward Taiwan.</p> <p>Harris arrived in Seoul following a trip to Japan to meet with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida earlier this week. She also attended the state funeral for former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was assassinated earlier this year.</p>

	<p>South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff did not offer further details about Wednesday's missile launch. The group had previously detailed the speed and distance traveled by Sunday's missile.</p> <p>The U.S. military released a statement condemning the North's first launch on Saturday. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Kim Seung-kyum and the U.S. Forces Korea Commander Paul LaCamera had also been in contact regarding the launch, according to Reuters.</p> <p>"We are aware of the ballistic missile launch and are consulting closely with our allies and partners," the United States Indo-Pacific Command said in a statement. "While we have assessed that this event does not pose an immediate threat to U.S. personnel or territory, or to our allies, the missile launch highlights the destabilizing impact of the DPRK's unlawful WMD and ballistic missile programs. The U.S. commitments to the defense of the Republic of Korea and Japan remain ironclad."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/28 Ian nearing Florida intensifies Cat 4 storm
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/28/ian-powers-up-to-a-category-4-hurricane-as-it-near/
GIST	<p>ST. PETERSBURG, Fla., (AP) — Hurricane Ian intensified into an extremely dangerous Category 4 storm as it approached Florida, and forecasters predicted it would retain top winds of 140 mph (220 kph) until landfall Wednesday afternoon. Tropical storm force winds and rain were already hitting the state's heavily populated Gulf Coast, with the Naples to Sarasota region at "highest risk" of a devastating storm surge.</p> <p>U.S. Air Force hurricane hunters confirmed Ian gained strength over warm Gulf of Mexico water after battering Cuba, bringing down the country's electricity grid and leaving the entire island without power.</p> <p>The hurricane could push as much as 12 feet (3.6 meters) of ocean water ashore in Florida, the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami said, urging people to evacuate the danger zone if they still can. More than 2.5 million people were under mandatory evacuation orders, but by law no one could be forced to flee.</p> <p>Ian was centered about 55 miles (100 kilometers) west-southwest of Naples at 6 a.m., swirling toward the coast at 10 mph (17 kph).</p> <p>Florida residents rushed ahead of the impact to board up their homes, stash precious belongings on upper floors and flee.</p> <p>"You can't do anything about natural disasters," said Vinod Nair, who drove inland from the Tampa area Tuesday with his wife, son, dog and two kittens seeking a hotel in the tourist district of Orlando. "We live in a high risk zone, so we thought it best to evacuate."</p> <p>The hurricane center predicted Ian would roar ashore Wednesday afternoon. Winds exceeding tropical-storm strength of 39 mph (63 kph) reached Florida by 3 a.m. and hurricane-force winds were expected in Florida well in advance of the eyewall moving inland, the Miami-based center said. Rainfall near the area of landfall could top 18 inches (46 centimeters).</p> <p>"It is a big storm, it is going to kick up a lot of water as it comes in," Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said in Sarasota, a coastal city of 57,000 in the storm's projected path. "This the kind of storm surge that is life-threatening."</p> <p>Ian's forward movement slowed over the Gulf, enabling the hurricane to grow wider and stronger. A hurricane warning covered roughly 220 miles (350 kilometers) of the state. Tampa and St. Petersburg were included, and could potentially get their first direct hit by a major hurricane since 1921.</p>

Gil Gonzalez wasn't taking any chances. He boarded the windows of his Tampa home with plywood and laid down sandbags to guard against any flooding. He and his wife packed their car with bottled water, flashlights, battery packs for their cellphones and a camp stove before evacuating.

"All the prized possessions, we've put them upstairs in a friend's house," Gonzalez said.

Airports in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Key West closed. Disney World theme parks and Sea World in Orlando all closed ahead of the storm.

A couple from England on vacation in Tampa found themselves faced with riding out the storm at a shelter. Glyn and Christine Williams of London were told to leave their hotel near the beach when evacuations were ordered. Because the airport shut down, they could get no flight home.

"Unfortunately, all the hotels are full or closed, so it looks as though we're going to be in one of the shelters," Christine Williams said.

Her husband insisted all would be fine. "You know, you got to go with the flow," Glyn Williams said. "So we're quite happy doing what we're doing."

The precise location of landfall was still uncertain, but with Ian's tropical storm-force winds extending 175 miles (280 kilometers) from its center, damage was expected across a wide area of Florida. Flash floods were possible across the whole state, and portions of its east coast faced a potential storm surge threat as Ian's bands approach the Atlantic Ocean. Warnings also were issued for isolated tornadoes.

Florida Power and Light warned those in Ian's path to brace for days without electricity. As a precaution, hundreds of residents were being evacuated from several nursing homes in the Tampa area, where hospitals also were moving some patients.

Parts of Georgia and South Carolina also could see flooding rains and some coastal surge into Saturday. Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp preemptively declared an emergency, ordering 500 National Guard troops onto standby to respond as needed.

Before turning toward Florida, Ian struck Cuba's Pinar del Rio province with sustained winds of 125 mph (205 kph) and causing destruction in the island nation's world-famous tobacco belt. No deaths were reported.

Local government station TelePinar reported heavy damage at the main hospital in Pinar del Rio city, tweeting photos of collapsed ceilings, widely flung debris and toppled trees. Some people left the stricken area on foot, carrying their children, while buses tried to evacuate others through waterlogged streets. Others opted to stay at their damaged houses.

"It was horrible," said Yusimi Palacios, a resident of Pinar del Rio inside her damaged house. "But here we are alive, and I only ask the Cuban revolution to help me with the roof and the mattress."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/26 BA.2.75.2 'most resistant' variant to date
SOURCE	https://time.com/6216760/ba-2-75-2-centaurus-omicron-variant-vaccine/
GIST	<p>Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, health officials have warned that the biggest barrier to controlling the virus would be its ability to mutate into ever more infectious and dangerous forms.</p> <p>The latest version raising alarms is an emerging subvariant of Omicron called BA.2.75.2. It's already gained the ability to evade the immunity provided by current vaccines and can't be neutralized by many of the antiviral drug treatments available. So far, the strain has been reported in 47 countries and in 39 U.S. states, where it still accounts for less than 1% of COVID-19 cases.</p>

Here's what we know so far about BA.2.75.2.

Where did BA.2.75.2 come from?

BA.2.75.2, as its nomenclature suggests, emerged from the BA.2.75 subvariant. It's growing quickly, particularly in India—although BA.2.75.2 accounts for only 0.5% of cases so far around the world. Because it shares many similarities with the existing subvariant, the [World Health Organization](#) has not designated BA.2.75.2 as a new variant but singled it out as an “Omicron subvariant under monitoring,” which means that health officials should prioritize tracking cases in order to hopefully prevent surges in infections. Some experts have unofficially started calling it Centaurus, after a [Twitter user gave it that nickname](#).

Why BA.2.75.2 is worrying public health officials

BA.2.75.2 has picked up three additional mutations from BA.2.75, two of which are where the virus binds to human cells in order to infect them.

According to one [study](#) by Swedish researchers published Sept. 16 as preprint—meaning the research has not yet been peer-reviewed—these aberrations are helping BA.2.75.2 evade all of the currently available antibody treatments authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration except for one: bebtelovimab. Made by Lilly, this monoclonal antibody treatment is given as an IV infusion to people with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 symptoms who are at high risk of progressing to more severe disease. But because the drug targets only a specific portion of the virus' spike protein, there's no guarantee that the virus won't develop mutations to evade it, too.

On Sept. 7 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Japanese scientists [reported](#) slightly more encouraging findings in their tests of BA.2.75 against available treatments. They too found that bebtelovimab could neutralize the variant, and also reported that some of the first antiviral treatments developed—remdesivir and molnupiravir—as well as the latest one, [Paxlovid](#), also remain effective.

But resistance is a feature of BA.2.75.2, which is why health officials are concerned. The Swedish scientists also reported that virus-fighting antibody levels from blood donors, some of whom had been vaccinated or recently infected with SARS-CoV-2, were five-fold lower against BA.2.75.2 than against the currently dominant Omicron variant, BA.5. They also found that BA.2.75.2 was resistant to the antiviral combination therapy Evusheld. Taken together, the scientists concluded, this variant “effectively evades the current [antibody] immunity in the population” and “represent[s] the most resistant variant characterized to date.”

How well do vaccines work against BA.2.75.2?

Right now, the picture is incomplete. Human studies of the [latest COVID-19 booster shot](#)—which targets two other Omicron subvariants, BA.4 and BA.5—have not been finished yet, and it's not clear how effective they will be against BA.2.75.2, either. But there are hints from studies involving the original vaccine about what kind of protection people might expect if the variant becomes more widespread.

David Montefiori, a viral immunologist at Duke University Medical Center who oversees testing of Moderna's mRNA vaccine's effectiveness against new variants, is now studying how blood samples from people immunized with Moderna's vaccine stand up against BA.2.75.2. In earlier studies against BA.2.75, the results were encouraging. In a [correspondence](#) published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on Sept. 9, he and his team reported that while levels of virus-fighting antibodies against BA.2.75 were more than four times lower than levels against the original virus among people vaccinated with Moderna's shot, they remained effective. However, BA.2.75.2's three additional mutations “could potentially make the virus less sensitive to neutralization,” he says, “but we have to test it and find out.” Results from those ongoing studies, funded by both Moderna and the National Institutes of Health, are expected in October.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/28/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-217-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said Ukraine will “defend” its citizens in Moscow-held regions that authorities have claimed voted in favour of merging with Russia. Zelenskiy said in a video on Telegram: “We will act to protect our people, both in the Kherson region, in the Zaporizhzhia region, in the Donbas, in the currently occupied areas of the Kharkiv region, and in the Crimea.” Agence France-Presse reported that Kremlin-backed officials in the four Ukrainian regions holding “referendums” claimed victory on Tuesday amid international condemnation of sham ballots. • Poland’s foreign minister, Zbigniew Rau, has said Nato’s response to any use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine should be non-nuclear but “devastating”. His comments come after Dmitry Medvedev, the hawkish deputy chairman of Russia’s security council, again threatened the west with the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine, saying: “Imagine that Russia is forced to use the most formidable weapon against the Ukrainian regime, which has committed a large-scale act of aggression, which is dangerous for the very existence of our state. I believe that Nato will not directly intervene in the conflict, even in this situation.” • European leaders have said sabotage is the most likely cause of leaks in two Nord Stream gas pipelines between Russia and Europe, after seismologists reported explosions around the Baltic Sea lines. Denmark’s military issued an image of gas bubbling at the surface of the Baltic after the “unprecedented” damage to the pipelines. • The European Commission president, Ursula Von der Leyen, threatened the “strongest possible response” to any deliberate disruption of European energy infrastructure in the wake of the Nord Stream damage. Swedish police said they had launched a preliminary investigation into possible sabotage. Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, has called the leaks “an act of sabotage” that “related to the next step of escalation of the situation in Ukraine”. • President Vladimir Putin is scheduled to address both houses of the Russian parliament on Friday and may use the address to formally announce the accession into Russia of the Ukraine territories that held referendums, the British Ministry of Defence said in its latest intelligence update. Putin said on Tuesday that Russia wanted to “save people” in the territories. • The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said the west would never recognise Russia’s annexation of Ukrainian territory, which he called part of a “diabolical scheme” by Moscow. Nato denounced the referendums as a “sham” and “violation of international law”. • The United Nations human rights office has said Russia’s invasion of Ukraine led to a wide range of human rights violations – including extrajudicial killings and torture – that could amount to war crimes, and had caused a dire rights situation. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a report that it was particularly concerned about torture and ill treatment of detainees by Russian forces and affiliated armed groups, but that there had been rights violations by both sides. • Georgia and Kazakhstan said that tens of thousands of Russians had flooded into their countries from neighbouring Russia as military-aged men avoid military call-up following Vladimir Putin’s mobilisation. • Moscow said it would not request the extradition of Russians travelling abroad to avoid being called-up to fight in Ukraine.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Russians flee to Kazakhstan; nearly 100K
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/almost-100-000-russians-have-crossed-into-kazakhstan-since-putins-mobilization-order-11664292051?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>MOSCOW—Nearly 100,000 Russians crossed the border into Kazakhstan in the days following Russian President Vladimir Putin’s announcement of a broad mobilization to generate new troops to fight in Ukraine.</p> <p>The flow is part of an exodus of Russians who have headed to countries such as Armenia, Georgia, Mongolia and Nordic nations in recent days and comes as uncertainty mounts over whether the Kremlin</p>

might mobilize additional manpower to complement the more than 300,000 reservists that were called up on Sept. 21.

The exact number of Russians who have left the country since what the Kremlin called a “partial mobilization” was declared isn’t known. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that he didn’t know the number of departures and directed requests for comment to Russia’s border guard agency.

Officials at the agency didn’t immediately respond to a request for data on the number of Russians who have left the country in the past week or how the figure compares with departures since the beginning of September.

But data published by nations that Russians don’t need a visa to enter or where they can stay for a temporary period without such documentation show that thousands have entered these countries in the past week.

The head of Georgia’s interior ministry told journalists Tuesday that the number of people entering the country from Russia has almost doubled in recent days, jumping from 5,000-6,000 to 10,000 people a day. At one of eight border crossings into Mongolia, some 3,000 Russians had crossed between Sept. 21 and Sept. 25, local border authorities said. Around 1,000 people usually cross this border each day, according to local media outlets.

Some Nordic countries have also seen an uptick in entries by Russians in recent days. On Sunday, 8,314 Russians entered Finland via the land border, according to data posted on the Finnish Border Guards website on Monday. Some 5,068 Russians left the country the same day. A rising number of Russian men are also crossing into Norway through the town of Storskog, one of the northernmost border posts on Earth. Some 243 Russians transited there on Sunday, a slight increase from previous weekends, local border officials said.

Many of the Russians who crossed into neighboring countries departed for other destinations, data show. In Kazakhstan, for example, Aslan Atalykov, acting chair of the Migration Service Committee at Kazakhstan’s interior affairs ministry told reporters on Monday that some 40,000 Russians had left Kazakhstan in recent days, heading south to neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. And almost 6,000 Russians had left by air. Of the 896 foreign citizens who applied for a residency in Kazakhstan between Sept. 1 and Sept. 24, around 10% were Russians, Mr. Atalykov said.

Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev ordered his government to help Russians entering his country, because “most of them are forced to leave because of the current hopeless situation,” he said in a meeting of community activists on Tuesday. “We must take care of them and ensure their safety. It is a political and a humanitarian issue,” he added.

On announcing the mobilization last week, Mr. Putin said only military reservists, primarily those who served in the armed forces and have specific military occupational specialties and corresponding experience, would be called up and he argued that it was necessary for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia.

He said those mobilized for duty would undergo “mandatory additional military training based on the experience of the special military operation,” Moscow’s euphemism for its war in Ukraine.

But questions have arisen, even among lawmakers, over Russia’s ability to properly support and equip the new recruits and this could present political problems.

Mikhail Delyagin, a political analyst and Russia’s State Duma deputy, said Tuesday that the mobilization had “[exacerbated public anxiety](#) about the material support of our armed forces.”

“Reports are multiplying about self-equipping mobilization first-aid kits, sleeping bags, shoes, clothes—almost everything except weapons,” he added in a post on his website. “In a number of places, there’s a

	<p>shortage of relevant goods. Not everyone has the money for these goods and this social tension could become political,” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Delyagin said he and a fellow member of his party, A Just Russia—Patriots for Truth, were requesting that Russia’s Ministry of Defense be ordered to provide information on the criteria for providing medicines, first-aid kits and food and clothing allowances to troops participating in Russia’s military operation in Ukraine.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Russia prepares to annex parts of Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-prepares-to-annex-ukrainian-regions-as-staged-votes-draw-to-an-end-11664281068?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>MYKOLAIV, Ukraine—Russia is set to formally annex occupied territories in Ukraine after staging referendums that involved coercion, threats and, in some places, soldiers going door to door and forcing people to vote at gunpoint.</p> <p>Kyiv and Western governments have described the votes as a sham designed to confer a veneer of legitimacy to Moscow’s seizure of Ukrainian land seven months on from its invasion. They could also enable Moscow to claim that any effort by Ukrainian forces to recapture the territories, in the south and east of the country, amounts to an attack on Russia itself.</p> <p>Residents in the occupied areas said Russian soldiers compelled them to vote, guns drawn, in a choreographed show of support for Moscow’s plan to make their regions part of Russia. They said some Russian sympathizers were brought in from other regions to cast their votes at polling places to create the impression that it was a regular vote.</p> <p>“This referendum, they’re doing it in their Russian style, just for pictures,” said Serhiy Ivaschenko, the head of a district in the city of Kherson, the only regional capital Moscow has seized since the full-scale invasion began this year. He has been going back and forth between Kherson and Ukrainian territory, leaving the city just before the staged voting began, but remains in touch with many people who are still there. He estimated that around 30% of Kherson’s prewar population remains in the city.</p> <p>“The Russians knock on doors,” Mr. Ivaschenko said. “It’s usually two women with a ballot box. And of course two soldiers with guns. But they don’t have the resources to knock on all the doors.”</p> <p>Voting in Russian-controlled parts of four regions—Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia—began on Sept. 23 and ended Tuesday afternoon, local time. As was widely expected, the official results claimed to show overwhelming support in the occupied territories for joining Russia, opening the way for Russian President Vladimir Putin to announce their annexation on Friday, when he is scheduled to address Russia’s parliament, the U.K.’s Ministry of Defense said.</p> <p>According to official results, 93% of voters in Russian-controlled parts of the Zaporizhzhia region checked the box in favor of joining Russia; in Luhansk, it was 91% in favor; in Kherson, it was 87% in favor. A comparable figure was expected in Donetsk.</p> <p>In a similar exercise, held in Crimea after Moscow seized the peninsula from Ukraine in 2014, 97% voted in favor of joining Russia, according to official results.</p> <p>The upper house of Russia’s parliament will consider formally annexing the provinces next Tuesday, according to Russian state media.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. would never recognize the annexation of Ukrainian territory by Moscow and that Washington would impose “additional severe and swift costs on Russia,” adding that Kyiv “has the absolute right to defend itself throughout its territory, including to take back the territory that has been illegally seized one way or another by Russia.”</p>

“Because there is no change at all in the territory that is being annexed by the Russians—as a matter for us, or for the Ukrainians—the Ukrainians will continue to do what they need to do to get back the land that has been taken from them,” Mr. Blinken told reporters in Washington on Tuesday. “We will continue to support them in that.”

The British defense ministry said, “Russia’s leaders almost certainly hope that any accession announcement will be seen as a vindication of the ‘special military operation’ and will consolidate patriotic support for the conflict.”

In Beryslav, a village in the southern Kherson region, one resident said soldiers had been going door to door with guns, forcing people to vote—in some cases in favor of joining Russia.

“I personally saw a man voting at the gate as two men in civilian clothes stood over him.”

Most people don’t answer when the Russian officials knock on their doors, she said. “They came to us and knocked on the gate. We didn’t come out, though we could see through the windows.”

One resident of Kherson city, whose husband works at a hospital, said Russians came to the hospital on Monday in an effort to organize doctors to vote. The hospital director refused, and told the Russians that it would prompt the doctors who remained at the hospital to leave, she said; in response, the Russians took the director away. One older woman and two soldiers also pressured patients at the hospital to vote, she said.

Arrangements were also made for some of the estimated 2.6 million Ukrainians who have fled to Russia since the start of the war to vote. Some are Russian sympathizers, while for others leaving Ukraine was the only way to escape the fighting.

Russian state television has portrayed the vote as a success, showing interviews with residents of the occupied regions saying how relieved they are that they will soon be part of Russia.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, “The Russian legal system and the executive branch are ready for the possible admission of new constituent entities to Russia following the referenda in the respective territories.”

By annexing the regions—and thereby calling them part of Russia—Mr. Putin hopes to deter Western countries from sending more military aid to Kyiv at a time when Russia has been dealt some of its heaviest setbacks of the war. Ukraine has reclaimed around 3,500 square miles of territory this month after a flash offensive that exposed some of the frailties of the Russian army.

Long-range rocket systems supplied by the U.S. have played a key role in turning the momentum in the conflict in Ukraine’s favor.

Now residents of Kherson say they fear that when the voting is over, men will begin to get called up to the Russian army following Mr. Putin’s mobilization order to raise more troops last week.

Mr. Ivaschenko said it was becoming harder to leave.

“I’ve received many more requests from people asking, ‘How can we leave the city?’” he said. “Even people who wanted to stay up until now want to leave.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Ukraine pushes deeper into Donetsk region
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-new-offensive-threatens-moscows-control-of-lands-it-seeks-to-annex-11664285782?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos5

RUBTSY, Ukraine—The Ukrainian military offensive that [ousted Russian troops from the Kharkiv region](#) early this month has now crossed deep into the northern part of the nearby Donetsk region, increasingly threatening Russian control over lands that [Moscow seeks to annex](#) as sovereign territory in coming days.

Here in Rubtsy, a village in Donetsk that Russia captured in late April, advancing Ukrainian forces stream east past burned-out carcasses of Russian tanks and the bloated bodies of Russian soldiers that remain on roadsides. Trophy pieces of Russian armor are being towed in the opposite direction, to be repaired and reused.

The Ukrainian push here, east of the Oskil River, aims to encircle the strategic town of Lyman, where street battles have begun, and ultimately target the northern parts of the nearby Luhansk region. Russia is wrapping up [sham referendums it is staging](#) in Donetsk and Luhansk, collectively known as Donbas, and two occupied regions of southern Ukraine, aiming to formally incorporate them into Russia as soon as this week.

Demoralized by recent defeats in Kharkiv, Russian soldiers on this front line continue to retreat, despite arriving reinforcements. On Sunday, Ukrainian forces took several prisoners in a nearby village because many of the Russian soldiers were drunk, said a Ukrainian soldier. “The ones who were sober ran away, and the ones who were drunk didn’t even realize that the village was being attacked, and got caught,” he said.

The soldier showed off two recently captured Russian T-80 tanks that had been towed to his position, the Russian tactical sign Z on their armor painted over with the white cross marking Ukrainian armor on this front. One only needed a battery change, he said. The other would require more intensive repairs because the retreating Russian crew had thrown a hand grenade into the barrel. “We’ll fix them and use them against the Russians,” he said.

In addition to the offensive in northern Donetsk, Ukrainian forces in recent days also expanded their foothold east of the Oskil river in the area of Kupyansk, the seat of Russian administration for the roughly 3,500 square miles of the Kharkiv region that [Ukrainian forces liberated this month](#). That defeat forced Russia’s President [Vladimir Putin](#) to [mobilize hundreds of thousands of reservists](#), and to call the annexation referendums. A separate Ukrainian push south of Lyman this month reclaimed the town of Svyatohirsk that Russian forces seized as recently as July.

Ukrainian forces remain on the defensive in other parts of the Donetsk region, such as the city of Bakhmut that Russian troops led by the [Wagner mercenaries](#) have been trying to storm for over two months, and Avdiivka near the regional capital. Russia currently controls about two-thirds of the region.

Here in northern Donetsk, Ukrainian forces are pursuing the remains of the Russian army that [retreated from the city of Izyum](#) in southern Kharkiv region on Sept. 10. That pullback, described by the Russian Ministry of Defense as a deliberate redeployment to better protect Donbas, was far from orderly, as judged by a large quantity of burned-out Russian armor along the road east of Izyum and in the pine forests surrounding it.

One tank had its turret flip upside down and land on top of it, the body of a crew member carbonized between the plates of his flak jacket. Somehow still intact, Russian Army rations of bacon were scattered by the wreck. Another tank sank while attempting a pontoon crossing over the Oskil, just its barrel and the top of its turret visible above the river’s fast waters.

Russian soldiers fleeing Izyum have scattered in small bands during the retreat, said the commander of a Ukrainian Army company that established an outpost in Rubtsy three days ago.

“Many are still hiding in the woods, some with weapons, some without weapons. That’s why we have to be vigilant, especially at night,” said the commander. “Sometimes they come out to the road by themselves to surrender because they have no food, no water, no nothing.”

With no electricity or cellphone service in the area, many of the remaining residents of Rubtsy, a leafy village with a prewar population of 1,500 people, flock to the commander's outpost, using its Starlink terminal to communicate with relatives and friends elsewhere in Ukraine and abroad. There is no other Ukrainian government presence here so far.

"Mostly old people have remained in the village," the commander, with the rank of captain, said. "They come for help, and we help with whatever we can—especially medication."

As he spoke, a battered car with several villagers rolled up. "Please, don't hand us over again, we've had enough with all this shooting, I can't take it anymore," Maria Savchenko implored as she asked for access to Wi-Fi. Anatoly Konoplya complained that six homes were destroyed by Russian bombs behind his street. Under the Russian occupation, he said, "we were like mice, sitting all the time in the basement and not coming out."

Shortly after the Russian invasion began on Feb. 24, Anatoly Khutornoy and his wife, Tetyana, moved to Rubtsy from the city of Slovyansk, which remains under Ukrainian control, hoping to sit out the war in what seemed like remote countryside. Instead, they have had to live through two battles, first when the Russians seized the village on April 26, and then when Ukrainian forces reclaimed it this month.

"We thought it would be quiet here, and it turned out quite the opposite," Mr. Khutornoy mused. He asked visitors for a cigarette, something that has been unavailable here for weeks. "I am so desperate for a smoke, I am ready to roll up my own ears."

His wife, still rattled by the recent fighting, said she was relieved that the Ukrainian army was back. "This day couldn't have come soon enough. We are here on our own land, and those people came here saying they want to free us. Free from what?"

Under Russian rule, the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, a proxy statelet that Moscow established since occupying parts of the Donetsk region in 2014, created its own administration in Rubtsy, naming a new village mayor. These officials and other collaborators have all escaped as the Ukrainian army arrived, said Vladimir Gurenkov, a retired miner from Donetsk city who moved here in 2010.

He recalled, pained, the day when the Ukrainian army retreated under fire in April. "I am so glad Ukraine is back now," Mr. Gurenkov said. "Putin wanted to show his strength here, and he just lost. The Russian world has collapsed."

In the nearby village of Lozove, secured by Ukrainian forces on Saturday, 17-year-old Ivan Buddenyi was also giddy with delight. "We have been waiting for this day ever since these animals came in," he said as he examined his school, which served as an outpost for Russian forces. Its windows were blown out, doors pushed in. "We couldn't live normally as long as they were here," he added, shouting "Glory to Ukraine."

Villages such as Rubtsy have survived the two changes in control with relatively limited damage, except for the main square, which bears the traces of Russian aerial bombing in March. But others, such as the village of Yatskivka, are nearly completely destroyed, with twisted remains of burned houses and fragments of armored vehicles meshed together amid giant craters.

One of a handful of remaining residents in Yatskivka, a retired woman, tried to extinguish a lingering fire in a bombed-out building next to the remains of her home. She brought bucket after bucket of water from a swimming pool in a former resort across the street that was used by Russian troops. Melted military walkie-talkies lay on the ground and a warning sign "Mines" was scrawled by the entrance.

"I have lived here all my life, happy with everything Ukrainian, and Putin just came and brought here his Russian world. Now everything is burned down, nothing is left here," the woman lamented as she filled another bucket. She said she was too afraid to give her name. "If they come back," she added, "they could execute me."

HEADLINE	09/27 GM backpedals return-to-office plan
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/gm-revises-return-to-office-plan-amid-employee-concerns-11664312310?mod=hp_lista_pos5
GIST	<p>General Motors Co. is backpedaling on aspects of its return-to-office plans amid criticism from employees, the latest example of companies straining to navigate their pandemic-era work policies.</p> <p>An employee memo sent Friday from Chief Executive Mary Barra and her leadership team outlined plans to have salaried employees return to the office three days a week, a policy set to take effect later this year. Many employees viewed the change as a departure from plans the company implemented last year, which emphasized flexibility and didn't require in-office days, people familiar with the matter said.</p> <p>On Tuesday, a follow-up email from Ms. Barra's team, viewed by The Wall Street Journal, sought to clarify last week's message, saying it generated "questions, concerns and misconceptions." It also called the timing of the original message, delivered on Friday afternoon, unfortunate.</p> <p>The return to in-office days now won't be required before the first quarter of next year, the Tuesday email said. The email also clarified that the company won't mandate which days of the week employees will be expected to be present. The policy is expected to stick to the three-days-in-office requirement, said a GM spokeswoman, who confirmed the Tuesday memo.</p> <p>News of the memo was reported earlier by the Detroit Free Press.</p> <p>GM will solidify its return-to-work plans by the end of October, the Tuesday email said.</p> <p>"We intend to spend the next few weeks continuing to listen to your feedback," the memo said. "Balancing the flexibility to ensure that you can manage your life outside of GM is a primary consideration."</p> <p>In April 2021, GM implemented a plan it called "Work Appropriately," which didn't mandate in-office days but gave managers latitude to work with their teams to develop a tailored approach based on their workflows.</p> <p>It was a nod to a policy that Ms. Barra implemented a decade earlier as GM's human-resources chief, when she boiled down a 10-page dress code to two words: "Dress appropriately."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Home prices first monthly decline in years
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/home-price-growth-slowed-in-july-11664283601?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>U.S. home prices slid in July from June, the first monthly decline in years and the latest sign that higher mortgage rates are starting to weigh on home prices in many of the country's biggest markets.</p> <p>The S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller National Home Price Index, which measures the average change in home prices across the nation, fell 0.3% in July from June, the first month-over-month decline since January 2019. On a seasonally adjusted basis, the national index fell 0.2%. That was the first monthly decline in more than a decade by this measure.</p> <p>Home prices are still rising on a year-over-year basis, even though the pace of growth has slowed. The national index rose 15.8% in the year that ended in July, down from an 18.1% annual rate the prior month. But housing economists expect home-price growth to slow significantly by the end of the year.</p> <p>"July's report reflects a forceful deceleration," said Craig Lazzara, managing director at S&P Dow Jones Indices. "As the Federal Reserve continues to move interest rates upward, mortgage financing has become more expensive."</p>

In the Case-Shiller 20-city index, metro areas on the West Coast were among the hardest hit. San Francisco, where prices fell 3.5%, and Seattle, down 3.1%, suffered the biggest one-month declines.

The Case-Shiller index, which measures repeat-sales data, reports on a two-month delay and reflects a three-month moving average. Homes usually go under contract a month or two before they close, so the July data reflects purchase decisions made earlier in the year, when interest rates weren't as high as they are now.

The average rate on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage was 6.29% in the week ended Sept. 22, up from 2.88% a year earlier, according to housing-finance agency [Freddie Mac](#).

Other recent data also show that the spike in borrowing rates is cooling off the once-hot housing market by making homeownership far less affordable. Existing-home sales have fallen for seven straight months through August. The National Association of Realtors' housing-affordability index, which factors in family incomes, mortgage rates and the sales price for existing single-family homes, [fell in June to the lowest level in decades](#) before ticking upward in July.

The median existing-home price rose 7.7% in August from a year earlier to \$389,500, according to NAR. The Case-Shiller 10-city index gained 14.9% over the year ended in July, compared with a 17.4% increase in June. The 20-city index rose 16.1%, after an annual gain of 18.7% in June. Price growth decelerated in all of the 20 cities.

Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal expected the 20-city index to gain 17.3%.

On a year-over-year basis, Tampa had the [fastest home-price growth in the country](#), at 31.8%, followed by [Miami, at 31.7%](#).

A separate measure of home-price growth by the Federal Housing Finance Agency also released Tuesday found a 13.9% increase in home prices in July from a year earlier and a 0.6% decline from June.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Skykomish businesses struggle amidst fire
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3652254/skykomish-businesses-bolt-creek-fire/
GIST	<p>With evacuations and Highway 2 closures, the Bolt Creek Fire has dealt Skykomish one blow after another these past few weeks.</p> <p>As the 17-square-mile fire burns high atop the hillside to the north of town, Skykomish is under a Level 2 Get Set evacuation — meaning people should be prepared to go at a moment's notice. So far, the fire has not destroyed any homes.</p> <p>“It’s a steep hillside, and it could creep down the hill,” Skykomish Mayor Henry Sladek told KIRO Newsradio. “As it creeps down the hill, it gets closer to town — but that’s the point at which they can fight the fire, when it gets down to the road level.”</p> <p>Some residents have already packed up and left. Others, including those who own small businesses, have chosen to stay behind — but they are finding their clientele diminished.</p> <p>“When the highway is closed, everybody has had really reduced hours — or even been closed,” Sladek said.</p> <p>Normally, this would be the bustling tourism season for the town, with hikers flocking to the Cascades and road-trippers stopping on their way across the pass. However, with Highway 2 between Index and Skykomish closing for two weeks — and then closing again between Grotto and Skykomish on Monday, just two days after reopening — the town is much quieter.</p>

In addition to his mayoral duties, Sladek owns the Cascadia Inn downtown. Over the weekend, when the highway briefly reopened, tourists returned — but now the hotel is empty again.

“We’ve had visitors as recently as two, three days ago,” Sladek said. “We expect we’ll have some again this weekend, assuming that the highway reopens.”

In the meantime, he is keeping the hotel’s doors open in case those living closest to the fire need to evacuate their homes.

“We’re really holding rooms available for people who really need it in case of emergency,” he said. “And then we’ve had some firefighters stay.”

The highway closure does not just mean a lack of people, but also a lack of goods for businesses. Deliveries for shops and restaurants have been sporadic, with access to the town limited to the east side, across the pass.

“We finally made arrangements to get the mail delivered — our mail wasn’t delivered for two weeks,” Sladek said.

As mayor, he has told Town Hall staff to leave if they feel that is safest, but he plans to stay behind unless evacuation orders move to Level 3.

“We are packed, but I would probably be one of the last people to leave — just by virtue of being the mayor,” he said.

While the idea of being able to see fire on the hillside while standing in town may sound scary, Sladek is not too worried. He explained that rather than looking at an entire mountain in flames — as you might see in a Hollywood disaster movie — they are mostly seeing smoke, with patches of fire here and there across the hillside.

“Although it’s a bit unnerving to see fire that close, you trust that they know what they’re doing — they can keep it at bay,” Sladek said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Eastside Fire not rehiring let-go firefighters
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3652368/dori-eastside-fire-still-refuses-to-rehire-firefighters-released-over-covid-mandates/
GIST	<p>While fire departments throughout the Puget Sound region are gradually re-hiring first responders who were let go from their jobs over religious or medical objections to the state’s COVID vaccination requirements, Eastside Fire and Rescue is refusing to budge.</p> <p>For veteran – and now former – firefighters like Frank Dahlquist, the impasse makes no sense.</p> <p>“A bunch of departments have decided they are rehiring the guys that were fired,” Dahlquist confirmed to The Dori Monson Show. “They saw the mandate coming to an end and there was no point in further discriminating against these members and they’re welcoming these members back with open arms at a time when every agency is hiring.”</p> <p>Dahlquist, who would like to get his job back, said Eastside Fire and Rescue has 28 openings “yet they won’t allow us to come back.”</p> <p>As many as 200 firefighters across the region were released by various departments when they refused to get the state mandated COVID vaccine. Some departments released first responders because they could not give them accommodations to stay on the job.</p>

	<p>With current staffing stretched thin, asked Dori, what is that costing Eastside Fire and Rescue taxpayers? “Overtime budgets are running near \$300,000 a month,” according to Dahlquist.</p> <p>“It’s unsustainable,” he told Dori. Taxpayers in “Issaquah, Sammamish, North Bend, Carnation, the two fire districts 10 and 38 – they’re footing the bill for this.” The district also includes Preston and Woodinville – 15 fire stations total.</p> <p>With emergency response staffing working so much overtime, Dahlquist added, “morale is at an all-time low – 3 out of 10 in our agency.”</p> <p>But when other departments are re-hiring, Dori probed, why not Eastside Fire and Rescue?</p> <p>These decisions are made department by department, and chief by chief, Dahlquist said. Some of Dori’s sources have indicated that the holdout is coming from King County Executive Dow Constantine’s office.</p> <p>“We’ve heard the same thing,” Dahlquist said, adding that there are public records requests in the works that link leaders at the fire agencies to Constantine and to the governor’s office.</p> <p>“It’s so destructive,” Dahlquist said. “We look at this as not just a job, but a calling. At any given moment, we would risk our lives for someone else’s. It chokes me up just thinking about the 191 years of experience that were lost at Eastside when we were purged.”</p> <p>The discharged firefighters are seeking support from the public and plan to attend an Oct. 13 fire district board meeting to rally for their former jobs. Dahlquist says the discharged firefighters refuse to give up.</p> <p>“These are people who just want to come back to work.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Fla. evacuation orders ahead of Ian landfall
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/09/27/hurricane-ian-florida-evacuation-orders/
GIST	<p>TAMPA — Floridians streamed out of low-lying coastal communities, stocked up on sandbags and supplies, and boarded over windows Tuesday as Hurricane Ian barreled toward the state with what Gov. Ron DeSantis called “historic storm surge and flood potential.”</p> <p>The storm is forecast to make landfall along Florida’s southwest or west central coast between Wednesday afternoon and night as a major Category 4 storm.</p> <p>Although officials in Tampa expressed relief that the hurricane forecast’s path had moved south, possibly reducing the risk of catastrophic flooding in the uniquely ill-prepared city, surrounding Hillsborough County and other jurisdictions along the Gulf Coast expanded evacuation orders that already covered more than 2 million Florida residents. DeSantis (R) warned that severe impacts were still expected in the Tampa Bay region and urged those who had already left to stay away.</p> <p>“We are looking at really, really major storm surge up and down the west coast of Florida,” DeSantis said. Before heading toward Florida, Ian ravaged through Cuba, disrupting the country’s electricity grid. As of 8:30 p.m. Tuesday, the national electric system was generating zero power, leaving the entire country without service, according to Cuban state media.</p> <p>Local leaders in Florida cautioned that even an indirect hit from the hurricane could devastate waterside communities, and authorities said impacts were expected across the width of the peninsula. Power outages could linger for days, while “disruptions in fuel supplies” are possible, the governor said.</p> <p>Dozens of emergency shelters began to welcome evacuees and their pets. Airports were closed. Urban search-and-rescue teams, high-water vehicles and law-enforcement aviation units were prepositioned</p>

around the state. Five thousand Florida National Guard troops, as well as 2,000 additional troops from other states, were activated, officials said.

Some residents who decided to wait out the storm were rushing to make last-minute preparations, stocking up on supplies and hurricane-proofing their homes. Others, meanwhile, were racing to escape Ian's path.

South Tampa residents Raymond Oubichon and his girlfriend, Chantell Holden, hit the road at 6 a.m. Tuesday and by midmorning were in the parking lot of a fully booked Motel 6 just off Interstate 75 in Ocala, Fla., about 100 miles north of home. They'd struck out at other hotels and were waiting to see if a room opened after check-in.

Oubichon, 49, a retired entertainer from New Orleans, was out of town when Hurricane Katrina devastated that city in 2005. But his family and neighborhood were hit hard.

"So I know what water and storm surge can do," Oubichon said. "I've only been in Tampa for two years, but I did not want to try to ride out a hurricane here." He added, even if it meant having to put overpriced hotel rooms on his new credit card. "I don't want to max it out already, but also, I don't want to die. So here we are."

The storm intensified overnight Monday before making landfall as a Category 3 hurricane early Tuesday in Cuba. By 8 p.m. Tuesday, Ian was moving at a speed of 120 mph about 180 miles south-southwest of Punta Gorda, Fla.

While still subject to shifts, weather model projections on Tuesday began to converge on the idea of Ian making landfall in Florida between Fort Myers and Sarasota some time Wednesday afternoon or night.

That means the highest storm surge risk could be just to the south of Tampa Bay, with as much as 12 feet of ocean water surging over normally dry land. But Jamie Rhome, acting director of the National Hurricane Center, said that should not prompt Tampa-area residents to pull back on preparations. The ground is soft following the region's summer rainy season, downed trees are likely to cause extended power outages, and some models suggest up to two feet of rain is possible in some areas.

"Don't get enamored with the track and its recent shifts," Rhome said.

The storm's southward drift evoked memories of Hurricane Charley, which in 2004 abruptly swerved east and pummeled Punta Gorda, Fla., instead of striking Tampa. But DeSantis stressed on Tuesday that Ian was different from Charley — and probably worse.

"Charley was a lot smaller ... and most of the damage from Charley was from wind and wind destruction," DeSantis said. "What we have here is really historic storm surge and flooding potential. So if you look at places like Fort Myers, Charlotte County, Sarasota, the storm surge you are going to see generated from this is going to far eclipse what we saw there."

Despite officials' stern warnings and evacuation orders, some veterans of Florida's fall hurricane seasons said they were comfortable with a certain amount of risk.

On Treasure Island, Fla., a barrier island just north of St. Pete Beach, Paul Payne and his wife loaded up their car Tuesday morning, but only after spending three days mulling what to take. Payne, a retired electrical engineer, settled on fleeing with their dog, clothes and computers — but they decided to go only as far as a hotel he deemed sufficiently above sea level in St. Petersburg, Fla., a city also largely under evacuation orders.

"Looks like the eye is going to further south of Tampa Bay, and if that holds, then I think we will be in good shape," said Payne, a recreational sailor who had evacuated his home three times over his 37 years in Florida. "Everybody that lives in Florida is aware of the fact that they can have stressful times when hurricanes come ... but hopefully it doesn't happen more than every 20 years or so."

In South Tampa at a sprawling neighborhood surrounded by water on three sides, 63-year-old Jo Ann Dusol said she would remain in her one-story house, strategically placing 12 sandbags around to try to keep floodwaters at bay. Dusol said she simply couldn't leave knowing her family — Onyx and Chloe, her two pit bull and chow mixes — would struggle around other dogs in a shelter.

"They are protective, and those are my girls, and they take care of me," said Dusol, who was gathering supplies at a convenience store. "I am nervous, but I have lived here my whole life, so you learn how to become more and more prepared."

If Tampa Bay does overflow its banks and threaten her house, Dusol said she already has a plan, "I could be one of those [Hurricane] Katrina people sitting on top of my roof waving at people."

The challenge of pinning down Ian's track meant difficult decisions for many residents on whether to evacuate or stay, according to researchers who study hurricanes and evacuations.

"The public is demanding precision in hurricane forecasts that we are able to give them in most storms," said Jason Senkbeil, a professor in the geography department at the University of Alabama. But with Ian, he said, "it's frustrating."

On Monday, when jurisdictions in the Tampa Bay region began handing down evacuation orders, for example, it was clear Ian would eventually arrive as a strong storm, but plausible variations in its forecast track could mean the difference between relatively brief hurricane force winds and "a huge rainfall and surge event," Senkbeil said.

On Key West, Mark Jacob decided to roll up the striped awnings and board the windows of his store, Duck and Dolphin Antiques. He and a friend covered the glass with numbered wooden planks, carrying out a routine he had done several times with the same boards over the past two decades.

"You usually walk down Duval Street," Jacob said, referring to Key West's main drag, "and say, 'Should I? Shouldn't I?'"

But Barry Dell, a 60-year-old Cincinnati native who has been staying on the island, decided to hunker down at Key West High School, which opened as a shelter in anticipation of the storm. Dell said a local told him that Ian would be "no big deal" in the Keys. But it didn't make Dell feel better. Calling himself a hurricane "first-timer," he said he was "scared to death."

Kristen Livengood, a spokeswoman for surrounding Monroe County, said advances in hurricane forecasting allowed officials to avoid evacuating the Keys. "Ten years ago, this would have been a mass evacuation of all the Florida Keys and all the visitors and a major stop to everything," Livengood said. Instead, county officials told people who live in campgrounds, RVs or aboard docked boats to seek shelter by midafternoon Tuesday.

Jennifer Collins, a geosciences professor at the University of South Florida who lives in the Tampa region, said her neighbors had been peppering her with questions about storm threats and whether to evacuate. While they weren't in an evacuation zone, there are still risks that may be too great for some to stay behind, she explained.

"They still focus on the center of the cone and not the edges of the cone," Collins said. "You can get significant impacts outside of the cone. It's kind of frustrating to me that they do that. At some stages they have been saying, 'Oh, we're okay,' and I'm like, 'I don't know why you think we're okay; we're not. We should be getting prepared.'"

The hurricane's biggest threat may be the storm surge — a rise in ocean water over normally dry land caused by low air pressure and winds. The National Hurricane Center predicts Ian could send as much as 5 to 10 feet of storm surge onto Florida's coastline, a hazard that can be deadly and destructive. The gentle

slope of the ocean bottom along the Florida coastline means that even a minor hurricane or tropical storm can cause serious coastal inundation.

The storm's expected slow movement as it approaches Florida also probably means sustained, flooding rains, with 10 to 20 inches or more possible in some areas.

At a public park in West Tampa on Tuesday, dozens of cars lined up to fill sandbags, snaking around the block more than an hour after the site was set to close. Even after the location ran out of empty bags, residents piled sand into plastic buckets, trash can liners and bright blue Ikea bags.

As she loaded her SUV trunk with sandbags, Annie Blackard, 26, said she's been in Tampa "for all the near misses," but Hurricane Ian feels different. She had stocked up on board games, food and water, grabbing supplies from stores with near-empty shelves that reminded her of the early days of the covid-19 pandemic.

"I've never gotten sandbags before, I've never boarded my house," Blackard said. "But this one we're expecting flooding."

In Tampa's Ybor City neighborhood, the city's lively Cuban-inspired entertainment district, most bars and restaurants were already closed. Amid bouts of drizzle and intermittent sunshine, some shop owners were boarding up their businesses as they prepared for the storm.

But at Longash Cigars, three torcedors — cigar-rollers — kept at their work in preparation for a last-minute rush of customers. Each torcedor can roll about 100 cigars per day.

The store's owner, Mike Cincunegui, was waiting until Tuesday evening to cover its windows and safeguard his merchandise, which also includes about 90 brands of pre-rolled cigars.

"If we get a direct hit, I think this is going to be as bad as Tampa is ever going to get hit," said Cincunegui, 39. "I don't fear things like loss of life as much, but I fear power outages for weeks on end. Flooding, people stranded."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Officials: pipeline breaks look 'deliberate'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/world/europe/pipeline-leak-russia-nord-stream.html
GIST	<p>BERLIN — Explosions under the Baltic Sea and the rupture of major natural gas pipelines from Russia to Germany appeared to be a deliberate attack, officials across Europe said on Tuesday, deepening uncertainty about European energy security amid soaring prices and fears of running short of fuel over the winter.</p> <p>Three separate leaks erupted from the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines, which were already caught up in the conflict over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, sending swirling streams of methane to the surface of waters off Denmark and Sweden. Top Polish and Ukrainian leaders blamed Moscow, while Russian state media suggested U.S. or Ukrainian involvement.</p> <p>"It's hard to imagine that it's accidental," Denmark's prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, told reporters while on a trip to Poland to open a new undersea pipeline that will carry Norwegian gas — a judgment echoed by officials in several countries.</p> <p>On Tuesday evening, Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, called the incident "apparent sabotage" in a tweet, only hours after the White House press secretary had declined to say whether the United States thought the pressure loss was deliberate or accidental.</p> <p>Mr. Sullivan wrote that he spoke to his "counterpart Jean-Charles Ellermann-Kingombe of Denmark about the apparent sabotage of Nord Stream pipelines."</p>

“The U.S. is supporting efforts to investigate and we will continue our work to safeguard Europe’s energy security,” he wrote.

Swedish seismologists reported detecting the underwater explosions on Monday, and pipeline monitors registered a swift drop in the conduits’ pressure. Later, patches of sea surface in the same areas as the explosions began roiling with dangerously combustible gas, forcing shipping to steer clear. Several countries said they were investigating the cause.

The apparent attack had no immediate effect on European energy supplies; Nord Stream 2 has never gone into service, and Nord Stream 1 has been shut down since August. But it raises the stakes — and European jitters — in a simmering energy war between Russia and the West prompted by the invasion of Ukraine. Repairs could take up to several months, experts say, beginning with detailed inspections of the damage before any work could begin.

No matter who is to blame, the leaks hammered home the message that Europe and its energy infrastructure are vulnerable, even if Europe succeeds in its mission of weaning itself from Russian energy.

The Central Intelligence Agency delivered a vague warning in June to several European nations, including Germany, that the Nord Stream pipelines could be attacked, according to several senior U.S. officials familiar with the intelligence. They declined to say whether that warning identified Russia as a possible attacker, and said they had reached no conclusion about who was responsible for the incidents on Monday.

The C.I.A. warning was first reported on Tuesday by the German publication Der Spiegel. The agency declined to comment.

Military and security experts have warned for years of the danger posed by so-called hybrid warfare, meaning the ability to undermine democratic functions, disrupt normal life and sow chaos and uncertainty. The Nord Stream leaks made evident how exposed vital systems can be to outside attacks, said Julian Pawlak, a researcher at the German Institute for Defense and Strategic Studies.

“The most important message that somebody wants to send, is what one is capable of doing with an offline pipeline can also be done with active pipelines, or undersea cables, or other infrastructure,” Mr. Pawlak said.

In response, Denmark and Norway announced increased security around their energy infrastructure, and Norway, now Europe’s most important producer of gas and oil, called for “increased vigilance by all operators and vessel owners.” In a statement, Norway’s energy minister, Terje Aasland, cited “reports of increased drone activity” around its coast, and said that much of what he had learned of the Nord Stream incidents “indicates acts of sabotage.”

Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, speaking at the opening of the Baltic Pipe project, which connects Poland to Norway through Denmark, blamed Russia for targeting the pipelines, saying the leaks were an attempt to further destabilize Europe’s energy security.

“We do not know the details of what happened yet, but we can clearly see that it is an act of sabotage,” Mr. Morawiecki said. “An act that probably marks the next stage in the escalation of this situation in Ukraine.”

The Kremlin-controlled RIA Novosti news agency noted that the United States “is an active opponent of Russian gas supplies” and has stepped up sales to Europe to help make up for the drop from Russia.

In Washington, Karine Jean-Pierre, the White House press secretary, and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken declined to speculate about what had caused the leaks, but pledged that the United States would support Europe in securing its energy supply.

“This just drives home the importance of our efforts to work together to get alternative gas supplies to Europe and to support efforts to reduce gas consumption and to accelerate true energy independence by moving to a clean energy economy,” Ms. Jean-Pierre said.

Before Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in February, Russia provided more than half of all natural gas imported by Germany and more than 40 percent used across the European Union, which relied heavily on it to heat homes, generate electricity and run factories. Days before the war began, Germany refused to let the just-completed Nord Stream 2 begin pumping gas from Siberia, and the European Union joined the United States in imposing stiff economic sanctions on Russia.

Moscow then began diminishing its supplies through existing lines, first choking off flows through overland pipelines, as President Vladimir V. Putin appeared to calculate that Russia could absorb the resulting economic pain longer than Europe could. Over the summer, Nord Stream 1 operated at a fraction of its capacity, and the flow halted in late August. The escalation has sent the price of gas soaring and forced leaders to call on businesses and citizens to reduce consumption or face rationing in the winter.

Reflecting the market’s sensitivity to threats, perceived or real, natural gas prices in Europe spiked on news of the leaks, with the benchmark Dutch contract jumping almost 20 percent on Tuesday to 208 euros (\$199) per megawatt-hour, compared with about €39 a year earlier. Gas prices, which have been volatile since the war began, peaked at nearly €350 in August but had been falling in recent weeks.

“This has all the hallmarks of a ‘burning down the house’ energy warfare strategy,” Helima Croft, head of commodities at RBC Capital Markets, said of the likely attacks. “Russia was never going to let the West have an easy energy detox, but these acts of sabotage portend a new dangerous, asymmetric phase in the Kremlin campaign to raise the economic stakes for its adversaries.”

The 27 European Union member countries agreed in July to cut natural gas use by 15 percent through the spring, and have arranged alternative supplies, allowing them to build up their stockpiles. The governments in Denmark and Germany both said on Tuesday that the leaks would not affect natural gas supplies in their countries.

It would be no simple matter to inflict damage on both of the Nord Streams, each of which is actually two pipelines. Lying more than 300 feet below the surface in places, the steel pipes are coated in concrete, designed to withstand the pressures at such depths, as well as changes in internal pressure on the 760-mile journey from Russia to Germany. They were subject to numerous stress tests and certification before being laid on the sea floor.

Swedish scientists said on Tuesday they had recorded two separate large underwater explosions, several hours apart on Monday, near the Danish island of Bornholm, that registered 1.8 and 2.3 on the magnitude scale used to measure earthquakes. They resembled explosions carried out by the Swedish Navy, said Björn Lund, associate professor of seismology at the Swedish National Seismic Network.

“It’s very clear that these were not earthquakes,” Mr. Lund said in a phone interview on Tuesday.

Operators of each of the two systems, independently of each other, soon after reported drops in pressure within the pipelines.

Footage [released by the Danish Defense command](#) showed a swirl of bubbling gas roughly half a mile in diameter on the surface of the Baltic Sea. Methane, the main component of natural gas, partly dissolves in water and is not toxic, but contributes to global warming.

The pipelines have long been [a focal point](#) of broader tensions between Russia and Europe. Ukrainian officials had criticized Germany for moving forward with the Nord Stream projects, which deepened European reliance on Russian gas. The Baltic Sea pipelines could also allow Moscow to stop using Soviet-era pipelines that cross Ukraine — and stop paying the related fees to Kyiv.

	<p>After Germany halted certification of Nord Stream 2, Mr. Biden imposed sanctions on the Russian-owned operator of the pipeline — a move some members of Congress had long sought — and the company has struggled to avoid bankruptcy.</p> <p>Mr. Pawlak of the German Institute for Defense and Strategic Studies said the pipeline leaks would, at a minimum, make Europeans more aware of the need to secure such critical infrastructure.</p> <p>“The security and military services were always aware, but it is another thing entirely to bring awareness into every political circle,” he said. “The significance of this should be to show how important it is to secure offshore energy assets.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Military forces, draft notices at border
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-referendums.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — The Kremlin has dispatched still more forces to shore up its faltering war effort, but the units are headed not to Ukraine but to Russia’s borders with other countries, where on Tuesday they were confronting young Russian men trying to join an exodus out of the country.</p> <p>As the avenues for Russians to escape a draft order issued last week narrowed, the Federal Security Service sent armored vehicles to the frontiers, where some men waiting to flee were being served military call-up papers, the state news media reported.</p> <p>The rush to the borders began within hours of President Vladimir V. Putin’s announcement last week of a military call-up affecting hundreds of thousands of Russians, and the flow has gotten only bigger since then. Though the Kremlin dismissed reports that it may soon forbid nearly all military-age men from leaving the country, many Russians were taking no chances.</p> <p>On Tuesday, at the borders of Georgia, Kazakhstan and even Mongolia, their numbers continued to swell, at times raising tensions.</p> <p>In Kazakhstan, responding to calls that the 4,600-mile border with Russia be closed, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev urged “humanity, patience and organization,” saying the Russians had been “forced to leave because of the current hopeless situation.”</p> <p>With cars lined up for miles at its border and waits of more than 48 hours, Georgia said it would allow visitors to enter on foot. The number seeking entry almost doubled over the past week, to about 10,000 a day, the country’s interior minister said.</p> <p>The forces of Russia’s Federal Security Service, the main successor agency to the K.G.B., were deployed at border crossings to ensure that reservists not leave the country “without completing border formalities,” the service said in a statement.</p> <p>Tensions were also high on Tuesday in Europe, where some officials were pointing fingers at Moscow after suspicious leaks were discovered in two gas pipelines running from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea. Amid concerns about possible sabotage, Sweden’s national seismic network said it detected two large undersea explosions on Monday near the locations of the leaks, and three countries were conducting investigations.</p> <p>Europeans also looked on in dismay as Russia moved forward with a political prong of its incursion into Ukraine. In four Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine, referendums — if in name only — on whether to abandon Ukraine for a future with Russia ended Tuesday, and even before the ostensible ballot counting was completed, Moscow was claiming victory.</p>

With little mystery over the purported outcome of the voting, conducted under armed guard, the only question left hanging at the end of the day was precisely when the Russian government would announce that it was formally annexing the four territories in eastern and southern Ukraine.

The staged votes were sham exercises in democracy, rights groups and Western officials said.

Over four days, Ukrainians were alternately cajoled and bullied into casting ballots in referendums stage-managed by the Kremlin. The Russian authorities and their proxies in Ukraine blended raw intimidation tactics — including placing armed men in ski masks at polling stations — with Orwellian messaging and a few stabs at festivities, among them thinly attended concerts on central squares.

“They bang loudly, they ring the doorbell, they give people a ballot and point with their rifles where to put the mark,” Dmytro Orlov, the exiled mayor of the occupied city of Melitopol, said in an interview.

The referendums earned broad international condemnation, and world leaders have vowed not to recognize the supposed results. But that did not stop Moscow from announcing them.

On Tuesday evening, Russian state news media was reporting what it described as results showing enormous levels of support for joining Russia. Tass, the Russian news agency, reported 92.68 percent in favor in Zaporizhzhia, 86 percent in Kherson in the south, and 93.95 percent in Donetsk and 98.53 in Luhansk, both in the east.

Ukrainian and Western officials say that Russia will likely use the referendums to concoct another pretext for war, over seven months after the full-scale invasion began.

In the days ahead, as Ukrainian forces continue [their battle to reclaim land](#) seized [by Russian forces in the east](#) and south, Moscow is expected to assert that Ukraine is attacking Russia, not the other way around — and that it will defend itself by any means.

On Tuesday, Dmitri Medvedev, the former president of Russia who now serves as deputy chairman of the country’s security council, reiterated on Telegram that Moscow had the right to defend itself with nuclear weapons, and said it was “definitely not a bluff.”

For all the flimsy, sometimes absurd theater of the referendums, the security implications for Europe were deadly serious, and Ukrainians were nervously mulling how far Mr. Putin might go.

“The mood is confident,” Oleksandr Danylyuk, a former secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, said in an interview. “They believe in the Army. But everybody is talking about nuclear. They are worried.”

Formal annexation would require a vote in the Russian Parliament. Mr. Putin is scheduled to address both of its houses on Friday, suggesting that a possible vote on annexation could take place then, Britain’s military intelligence agency reported.

Ukrainians have expressed fear that one immediate consequence of annexation would be conscription into the Russian military, forcing those in occupied territory to take up arms against their own country. In parts of Luhansk and Donetsk, which have been controlled by Russia and its proxies since 2014, that is [already the case](#).

After facing months of heavy casualties, Russia may need all the help it can get to sustain its war efforts. Western officials estimate that as many as 80,000 Russian soldiers have been killed or wounded in the war, and in recent weeks Russian forces have been pushed out of territory they seized earlier in the fighting.

Faced with the losses, Mr. Putin, [after long resisting a large draft](#), last week [ordered a “partial mobilization,”](#) calling up 300,000 people to join the fight. The order was described as applying only to

those with military experience, but across Russia — and especially in remote areas and [among ethnic minority groups](#) — there were numerous reports of people with no experience being swept up.

While many Russians headed for the borders, others took to the streets despite a Kremlin crackdown on dissent. The chaotic call-up has provoked an upwelling of discontent, with protests in more than 50 cities, [according to the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta](#). More than 2,300 people have been held under anti-protest laws in the past week, according to OVD-Info, a group that monitors political arrests in Russia.

Still others have attempted sabotage. Military registration and enlistment offices have suffered 21 arson attacks over the same period, the newspaper said. In Siberia on Monday, [a recruitment officer was seriously wounded by a gunman](#) who was apparently distraught over the mobilization.

The leaders of some European countries, already struggling to accommodate the historic numbers of refugees fleeing Russia's war, have debated what approach to take to all the young men now fleeing Russia itself.

Russian citizens have been fleeing to the European Union in droves since the military call-up, the E.U. border agency said Tuesday. From Sept. 19 to Sept. 25, nearly 66,000 Russian citizens entered E.U. countries, up 30 percent from the previous week, the agency said in a statement.

Some Russians may find a welcome from one Central Asian neighbor, Mongolia. A former president of Mongolia, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, has called on Buryats, a Russian ethnic minority, to flee there to avoid mobilization.

"Don't shoot Ukrainians," he said in a [video address](#) recorded in English. "Don't shoot your sisters and brothers, children and elders."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 CIA warned of potential pipeline attacks
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/world/europe/cia-nord-stream-pipelines-attack.html
GIST	<p>The C.I.A. issued a vague warning in June to a number of European nations, including Germany, that the two Nord Stream gas pipelines that carry natural gas from Russia could be targeted in forthcoming attacks, three senior officials familiar with the intelligence said on Tuesday.</p> <p>The warning was not specific, the officials said, and they declined to say whether Russia itself was identified as a possible attacker. American officials said that while it appeared likely that the damage to the pipelines was the result of sabotage, they had reached no conclusion about who might have been responsible. Both pipelines suffered a sudden loss of pressure and released gas into the sea, European officials reported, and the chances that both suffered accidents nearly simultaneously seem low.</p> <p>The German publication Der Spiegel was the first to report that the U.S. had provided what intelligence officials call "strategic warning" of a possible attack — a warning that came with no specifics about the likely time or place or manner of a potential strike.</p> <p>The C.I.A. declined to comment on the warning.</p> <p>The Biden administration, which in the run-up to the war often accused Russia of planning attacks on Ukraine, was careful on Tuesday not to blame Moscow — or anyone else. At a White House news briefing on Tuesday, Karine Jean-Pierre, the press secretary, said she was not going to "speculate on the cause of this."</p> <p>"Our partners are investigating this, so we stand ready to provide support to their efforts once they have completed their investigation," she said. Several officials cautioned that because the warning was three months old, it may not be connected to the most recent incidents.</p>

Ms. Jean-Pierre noted that the pipelines were not actively pumping gas into Europe when the pressure loss occurred. The older pipeline, Nord Stream 1, has not moved gas into Europe for weeks, with the Russians claiming they needed to do maintenance and repair work. That was widely seen in Europe as a warning that President Vladimir V. Putin could turn gas off as winter approaches, depending on whether Europe abandons the Western-led sanctions imposed after the Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine.

The newer pipeline, Nord Stream 2, has never been operational and Germany said it was canceling its part of the project shortly after the invasion.

Officials cautioned that it would be premature to conclude that Russia was behind the episode. Precisely because Mr. Putin seeks to show he has his finger on the gas valve, they noted, he may well want to keep the pipeline in good working order. A breach of the pipelines, if hard to repair, could hamper how he can control his leverage.

While some European governments were quick to charge Russian sabotage, American government officials said other possibilities also existed that could explain what happened.

Mr. Putin's government could have been trying to manipulate the pipeline somehow and inadvertently caused an accident, or, potentially, another country could have caused the leak in order to prevent Russia from profiting from the elevated energy prices. Nongovernmental actors could be behind the sabotage.

It also remains possible, even if unlikely, that no sabotage was involved and a pure accident caused the leak.

Earlier this week, the main directorate of the Ukrainian intelligence service posted a warning on Facebook that "the Kremlin is planning to carry out massive cyberattacks on the critical infrastructure facilities of Ukrainian enterprises and critical infrastructure institutions of Ukraine's allies. Attacks will be aimed at energy sector enterprises." But it noted that those could also be combined with physical attacks.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Saudi Arabia names new prime minister
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/world/middleeast/mohammed-bin-salman-prime-minister-saudi.html
GIST	<p>RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabia's powerful crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has been named prime minister, a post traditionally held by the king, in a government shuffle announced Tuesday.</p> <p>Prince Mohammed, who has already been the kingdom's de facto ruler for several years, previously served as deputy prime minister under King Salman as well as defense minister.</p> <p>He is being replaced as defense minister by his younger brother, Khalid bin Salman, who was deputy defense minister.</p> <p>The heads of other critical ministries, including interior, foreign and energy, remained in place, according to a royal decree from King Salman published by the official Saudi Press Agency.</p> <p>Prince Mohammed, who turned 37 last month, has been first in line to succeed his ailing father as king since 2017.</p> <p>Saudi Arabia has for years sought to quell speculation over the health of the 86-year-old king, who has ruled the world's top oil exporter since 2015.</p> <p>In 2017, it dismissed reports and mounting speculation that the king was planning to abdicate in favor of Prince Mohammed.</p>

King Salman has been hospitalized twice this year, most recently for a one-week stay in May that involved tests including a colonoscopy, according to state media.

Prince Mohammed became defense minister in 2015, a key step in his swift consolidation of power.

In that role he has overseen Saudi Arabia's military activities in Yemen, where the kingdom leads a coalition backing the internationally recognized government in its fight against the Houthi rebels aligned with Iran.

He has also become the public face of a sweeping reform agenda known as Vision 2030. Changes have included granting women the right to drive, opening cinemas, welcoming foreign tourists, defanging the religious police and hosting pop stars and high-profile heavyweight boxing matches and other sporting events.

Yet he has also jailed critics and, in a sweeping purge of the nation's elite, detained and threatened some 200 princes and businessmen in Riyadh's Ritz-Carlton hotel in a 2017 anti-corruption crackdown that tightened his grip on power.

He gained global notoriety for the 2018 killing of the dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the kingdom's Istanbul consulate.

Last year, President Biden declassified an intelligence report that found Prince Mohammed had approved the operation against Mr. Khashoggi, an assertion the Saudi authorities deny.

But the spike in energy prices triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine has spurred several Western leaders to travel to Saudi Arabia to appeal for ramped-up oil production, notably Boris Johnson, then prime minister of Britain, and Mr. Biden himself, who swallowed an earlier vow to make the Saudi leadership a "pariah."

Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany became the latest major leader to visit the kingdom, going there this past weekend.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 US maintains current cap on refugees
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/us/politics/biden-refugee-cap.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden said on Tuesday that a maximum of 125,000 people could be admitted into the United States as refugees during the next 12 months, continuing to pursue his campaign pledge to open the country to more displaced people from around the world.</p> <p>In a message to Congress, Mr. Biden said the cap on the number of refugees would remain the same as in the past year. That follows four years in which President Donald J. Trump significantly reduced the number of refugees who could be admitted.</p> <p>"I hereby determine that assistance to or on behalf of persons applying for admission to the United States as part of the overseas refugee admissions program will contribute to the foreign policy interests of the United States," Mr. Biden wrote.</p> <p>Refugee advocacy groups praised Mr. Biden's decision, noting the growing number of people who are seeking refuge in the United States and other countries because they have been displaced by natural disasters, political instability, famine, economic disruptions and poverty.</p> <p>But the advocates urged the Biden administration to speed up the processing of those who apply to enter the United States as refugees. Although 125,000 refugees could have been allowed entry last year, the administration processed only about 20,000.</p>

“Despite good-faith efforts, the Biden administration fell far short as it grappled with a decimated system inherited from its predecessor,” Krish O’Mara Vignarajah, the president of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, said in a statement.

The refugee system is only one of several ways that displaced people can apply to live in the United States. People crossing the border can apply for asylum if they can prove they would be persecuted at home. And in special circumstances, the United States government can grant “parole” to people from other countries, a legal tool that allows migrants entry but does not give them the right to pursue a green card or citizenship.

That is what Mr. Biden’s administration did in the cases of refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine. Tens of thousands of people from Afghanistan were paroled into the United States temporarily after the Biden administration withdrew American forces from the country. A similar process was used for tens of thousands of people fleeing Russian forces in Ukraine.

But those people do not count against the renewed 125,000-person cap because they are not formally considered refugees. They will not receive financial benefits reserved for official refugees, and they will not be able to pursue citizenship.

Bringing people from Afghanistan and Ukraine to the United States during the past year strained government resources. Officials in the Biden administration blamed Mr. Trump’s decision to gut many of the programs that deal with refugees and other people seeking to come to the United States.

Ms. Vignarajah said the decision to focus the administration’s efforts on those two countries made it more difficult for potential refugees from other parts of the world.

“As a result of prioritizing parole over rebuilding the refugee program, displaced children and families of many other nationalities continue to languish in yearslong backlogs,” she said. “This must be the year that the administration sees its refugee commitments to fruition.”

Last month, a group of 11 Democratic senators wrote to Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Alejandro N. Mayorkas, the homeland security secretary, urging them to rebuild the capacity of the refugee program in the United States so that more people can pursue new lives if they are driven from their homes.

“The need for robust refugee resettlement is high,” the senators wrote. “If current conflict trends continue, the 21st century will be defined by an ever-rising population of people forced to flee their homes and by increasingly limited options for them.”

“At this critical moment for refugees around the world,” the senators added, “the U.S.’s moral and legal obligation to our longstanding, bipartisan refugee resettlement program has never been more important.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Florida’s low-lying Gulf Coast braces for Ian
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/us/hurricane-ian-florida-tampa-gulf-coast.html
GIST	<p>TAMPA, Fla. — With so many near-misses over the decades, it had become common to believe Florida’s Tampa Bay region was somehow protected from hurricanes. The last one hit more than a century ago, in 1921, inundating much of Tampa and surrounding towns.</p> <p>Since then, gleaming high-rises have multiplied in downtown Tampa along the Hillsborough River. Shiny new condos look out on the bay in St. Petersburg. Home values in wealthy enclaves like Shore Acres have crept higher and higher, even though many of the properties are barely a foot above sea level.</p> <p>As Hurricane Ian winds its way north after swiping western Cuba, the Tampa Bay region and southwest Florida could now face a level of destruction that many who live along the densely populated coast and its</p>

white-sand beaches have never experienced. No matter where the storm hits, millions of people will be affected.

Cuba was already suffering. The [entire island was without power on Tuesday](#) night after a collapse of the power grid, the country's Ministry of Mines and Energy said. Officials said the power company was working to restore power, with the hope that some parts of the grid would be working by Wednesday morning.

Ian is forecast to make landfall in southwest Florida as a major hurricane on Wednesday night, with winds up to 130 miles per hour and the biggest storm surge — up to 12 feet — predicted roughly between Sarasota and Naples. That surge and accompanying rainfall are of particular concern for the state's western coast because the Gulf of Mexico is shallow, leaving excess water with no place to go but onto land. That geographical quirk helps explain why local officials have urged 2.5 million people in eight counties to evacuate.

Floridians on the Gulf Coast have watched Ian's wobbly track with increasing anxiety, emptying out supermarkets, hardware stores and gas stations even far from the hurricane's projected landfall. With evacuations underway up and down the coast, highways and major roads leading east have been jammed with traffic.

Most everyone, it seemed, had received the message that a storm need not hit a community directly for it to be disastrous.

"I'd rather have the house blow away without me than with me," Roger Glaim said as he and his wife, Muriel, both 92, checked into an emergency shelter at North Port High School in Sarasota County on Tuesday.

"Just trying to be safe," Muriel Glaim added.

Hurricane Ian killed at least two people in Cuba, prompted most of Florida's school districts to cancel classes and led to a pre-emptive state of emergency declaration in Georgia.

On Monday, it appeared that Hurricane Ian could be what many experts have long warned is Florida's near-worst case scenario: a storm that drowns vast swaths of property — and endangers lives — along the densely populated coasts of Tampa Bay and the adjacent stretch of the Gulf of Mexico.

"It will be like blowing up a balloon," said W. Craig Fugate, a former Florida chief emergency manager who later ran the Federal Emergency Management Agency, describing how water could swell in Tampa Bay. "Once it starts pushing, it's going to go up."

By Tuesday, as Ian's path shifted east, those worries had eased slightly for Tampa Bay, which could be spared the worst side of the storm. But similar concerns had sprung up for Charlotte Harbor, a shallow inlet between Sarasota and Fort Myers.

The most recent major hurricane to hit this part of the Gulf Coast, Hurricane Charley in 2004, was also supposed to make a direct hit on Tampa Bay but shifted at the last minute and made landfall as a Category 4 storm around Punta Gorda. That storm was smaller, moved quickly and produced more wind damage to buildings and trees than flooding.

"The storm surge that you're going to see generated from this is going to far eclipse what we saw there," Gov. Ron DeSantis said during a press briefing in Sarasota on Tuesday morning, comparing Ian with Charley.

Mr. DeSantis also warned that Ian is a much larger storm, a fact underscored by its effects being felt across southern parts of the state even before it made its Florida approach in earnest.

“This thing’s the real deal,” Mr. DeSantis said on Tuesday evening in Tallahassee. “It’s a major, major storm.”

A semiannual king tide flooded streets in the Florida Keys as Hurricane Ian’s rain bands swirled through, causing small power outages. Downpours inundated Miami. In preparation for worsening conditions, Disney said it would close some of its resorts near Orlando beginning on Wednesday. The Orlando airport said it would halt commercial flights on Wednesday.

Officials at Tampa International Airport said flight operations had been halted on Tuesday evening and the airport would fully shut down on Wednesday. The airport is close to Tampa Bay, so storm surge and flooding are a top concern, said John Tiliacos, the executive vice president of airport operations.

“To my knowledge, we have never had a storm of this magnitude that’s impacted us,” he said.

The 1921 storm, the most destructive to hit the Tampa area since 1848, was so powerful that it wrecked coastal structures for miles and smashed ships against docks after pulling them off their moorings. The Tampa/Tarpon Springs Hurricane, as the storm is known, made landfall on Oct. 25 with winds of about 120 miles per hour, a velocity that would have made it a Category 3 storm.

In 2015, [a report from Karen Clark and Co.](#), a catastrophe modeling firm based in Boston, called Tampa Bay the most vulnerable place in the United States for hurricane storm surge, pegging possible losses from such flooding at \$175 billion. In 2013, [a study by the World Bank](#) ranked Tampa as the seventh most vulnerable city to storms in the world.

Home to more than three million people, with about 700 miles of shoreline, the region is vulnerable even to minor storms because the Gulf of Mexico is shallow, said David S. Nolan, a professor in the atmospheric sciences department at the University of Miami. By comparison, storm surge in Miami can funnel back out to the Atlantic Ocean more quickly because the ocean floor there drops hundreds of feet not far from shore.

Then there’s Tampa Bay, which is also shallow and is enclosed by low-lying land on three sides. If winds hit at a certain angle — like if a storm turns inland to make landfall just north — they can blow a lot of water onto land, especially if the storm slows down.

“It’s just a very particular geometry of that bay,” Dr. Nolan said. “The way it’s positioned, it’s difficult for a hurricane to take a track that’s going to blow wind into the bay continuously.”

Martha Kohen, an architecture professor at the University of Florida who runs the Center for Hydro-generated Urbanism, has studied the area’s low-lying communities and said she worries about both the lack of elevation and the stock of older, weaker homes that could be in the path of Hurricane Ian’s storm surge. Florida tightened its building codes to withstand stronger storm winds after Hurricane Andrew devastated South Florida in 1992.

“It’s not going to be possible to rebuild in the same way,” she said. “Insurance will pay back once, maybe twice, but you have to change your location or change your elevation to be able to have insurance again.”

By noon on Tuesday, Shannon Fusco, the principal of North Port High School, was coordinating evacuee check-in.

“During Irma, we staffed the school and had close to 4,000 people and 2,000 animals,” she said, referring to the 2017 storm. “We have no way of knowing how many people are coming.”

Harbor Cove, a large community of manufactured homes and canals along the Myakka River west of North Port, was under mandatory evacuation orders and pretty much a ghost town on Tuesday. One resident who remained, Jim Belanger, was only there to finish packing before heading to a shelter for a couple of days.

	<p>In Largo, between Clearwater and St. Petersburg, Nancy Chulla, 72, prepared to leave her 1963 mobile home in Coquina Cove Residence RV Park. But first, she had an important task.</p> <p>Her husband, Bob, 80, died of cancer in May. She took the box with his cremated remains, sat at the end of her dock as the mullet jumped and tipped his ashes into the water. She had planned to do so on Oct. 15, his birthday, but worried that her home might not survive the storm.</p> <p>“It was what he had wanted,” she said.</p> <p>“People say, ‘Are you sure you want to go back?’” she said of living on such a vulnerable patch of land. Her answer is always yes: “I have my own beach. I don’t want to give it up.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Russia control of Ukraine airspace a failure
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/27/russias-bid-control-ukrainian-airspace-fails-spect/
GIST	<p>Russian and Ukrainian troops appear poised for a war of attrition that could drag on for years on the ground.</p> <p>In the air, Moscow may have already lost.</p> <p>Virtually all military observers expected Russia to dominate the Ukrainian skies within days of its Feb. 24 invasion, given its massive numerical edge in fighter jets, attack helicopters and a host of other metrics. Instead, Ukrainian airspace remains contested, thanks largely to a steady stream of anti-aircraft weapons from the U.S. and Europe and major strategic blunders from Russian commanders.</p> <p>Airpower strategists and military insiders say Russia’s failure to achieve air superiority over Ukraine has been one of the biggest shocks of the war so far and has contributed greatly to Moscow’s broader battlefield failures. Russia’s missteps in the air, they say, helped doom its ground assault on Kyiv in the early days of fighting. More recently, the lack of air dominance allowed a Ukrainian counteroffensive to push Russian ground troops out of Kharkiv and other key cities.</p> <p>There is little sign things will turn around soon.</p> <p>“I would say Russia has almost no chance to establish air superiority over the next several months,” one U.S. airpower strategist told The Washington Times recently, offering a blunt assessment that highlights how Russian troops have failed spectacularly in their push to use air superiority to pave the way for ground maneuvers.</p> <p>‘They don’t know how’</p> <p>Gen. James Hecker, the commander of U.S. air forces in Europe and Africa, said this month that Ukrainian air defenses have shot down at least 55 Russian warplanes since the beginning of the conflict. That’s at least 7% of Russia’s total fighter aircraft capacity, according to figures from the online clearinghouse Globalfirepower.com.</p> <p>Perhaps more important, Russia’s failure to secure the skies has allowed Ukrainian artillery and attack drones to establish forward positions and wreak havoc on Russian ground forces and vehicles. In the Kyiv and Kharkiv battles, Russian air dominance would surely have made major differences by protecting its own troops and giving its air force the freedom to rain destruction on Ukrainian positions.</p> <p>Specialists say Russia is not plagued by a lack of equipment. The Russian invading force has the fighter planes and defensive systems necessary to dominate the air. That includes electronic warfare capabilities that could jam Ukrainian drones long before they have the chance to strike.</p>

Still, the Russian military seems to have much deeper problems, including an apparent failure to anticipate the value of control of the skies.

“Many expected the Russians to execute the way the U.S. and our allies would, with cogent air doctrine, based on an offensive spirit and a comprehensive understanding of the importance of air superiority,” said retired Air Force Gen. David Deptula. “In fact, they don’t have the same air doctrine as the West, they don’t have the same level of training, they suffer from gross incompetence and poor leadership that focuses only on how air can support ground operations.”

Gen. Deptula planned the Persian Gulf War air campaign and the initial air attacks in Afghanistan in response to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

“The Russians have never used airpower in pursuit of strategic objectives in their entire history, so they don’t know how to best exploit airpower,” said Gen. Deptula, now the dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies.

Pentagon officials describe Ukrainian airspace as “contested.” Other observers privately describe the air war as a “stalemate,” with neither side achieving control but having enough effectiveness to deny their foe from achieving it either. Given the correlation of forces, however, even a draw represents a big win for Kyiv.

Writing in Defense News last week, Air Force Col. Maximilian Bremer, director of the special programs division at Air Mobility Command, and Kelly Grieco, a senior fellow with the Stimson Center and an adjunct associate professor of security studies at Georgetown University, said Ukrainian forces did not need to dominate the skies over the battlefields of the Donbas so long as they could effectively prevent Russian air dominance as well.

“By adopting an air denial strategy — that is, maintaining an air defense in being to keep Russia’s manned aircraft at bay and under threat — Kyiv thwarted Russia’s ability to not only ascertain the disposition of Ukrainian forces but also to respond rapidly to events once it became obvious where the counterattacks were taking place,” they wrote. “Quite simply, air denial — not the traditional concept of air superiority — was a prerequisite for Ukraine’s battlefield success.”

In some cases, Russian jets appear reluctant to enter Ukrainian airspace at all.

“Clearly, the Russians have used bombers and fighters, but a lot of what they’ve done is they stay in Russian airspace and they fire into Ukraine with long-range missiles,” the U.S. airpower strategist told The Times. “There is a sense they’re avoiding being shot at by staying in their friendly territory and using their weapons capabilities” at longer range.

“I am surprised at that,” the strategist said. “Certainly, when you just look at the numbers and capabilities, Russia ... should be able to use the air for their purposes. And they don’t seem to be able to.”

In Ukraine’s successful Kharkiv counteroffensive, Col. Bremer and Ms. Grieco said, “Ukrainian tanks and military vehicles rumbling down highways and across open fields in broad daylight should have made easy work for the Russian Air Force. But Ukraine’s air denial strategy made Russian pilots wary of flying into Ukrainian airspace at all, much less loitering and hunting for targets on their own.”

Leveling the playing field

Indeed, the raw numbers suggest a massive mismatch. The Russian air force boasts 4,173 total aircraft compared with Ukraine’s 318, according to Globalfirepower.com figures. From transport aircraft to fighter jets to attack helicopters, Russia’s air capabilities dwarf those of Ukraine.

Ukraine does have several key advantages. Ukrainian troops have proved to be remarkably effective at learning to use U.S.-made anti-aircraft weaponry with deadly precision. In addition to anti-aircraft artillery, Ukrainian drone strikes have crippled Russia's air defensive systems, though there is some evidence that Russia has stopped the bleeding on that front by bringing greater electronic warfare capabilities into the theater.

Still, Russian military commanders seem ill-equipped to take out Ukraine's anti-air assets before they can strike. Military insiders described a Russian war machine that has failed repeatedly to find those assets and hit them in a reasonable time frame.

"It takes them hours to days. And that's way too long," the U.S. airpower strategist said. "The ability to shoot and maneuver is keeping these Ukrainian forces alive. And until Russia can do something about that. ... I don't see any major campaign that gets them air superiority."

On the other hand, Ukrainian forces have worked closely with U.S. airpower officials in terms of strategy and the nuts-and-bolts work of operating the most sophisticated offensive weapons and anti-aircraft defenses. Ukrainian air force personnel have worked closely with the California National Guard for three decades, dating back to the breakup of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

"The Ukrainian air force has had an indoctrination on Western air operations and strategy, along with commensurate training on tactics, techniques, and procedures to accomplish those operational and strategic objectives, by years of partnership with an American Air Force superiority unit flying F-15s from the California Air National Guard," Gen. Deptula said.

By contrast, Gen. Deptula said, "the Russian military is optimized to slug it out on the ground."

"By fighting from the air, Ukraine realizes that it can turn that advantage around," he said.

To some extent, Ukraine's successes in the air cannot be quantified. Military insiders say Russia's inability to secure Ukrainian airspace has surely had a measurable impact on the morale of its ground troops, who were likely assured by their leaders that they would not come under fire from the skies.

"Armies that enjoy air superiority are generally very effective armies," the U.S. airpower strategist said. "They generally have decent to high morale, and they're able to move with confidence knowing that they're not going to get picked off by bombs or artillery falling from the air. And the opposite is true as well.

"I would imagine the morale on the front lines of the Russian forces, especially in the north on the front lines, is likely bottomed out," the strategist said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/28 US Pacific Summit faces rocky start
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/28/us-pacific-summit-faces-rocky-start-as-island-leaders-reject-washingtons-offers
GIST	<p>US attempts to bolster ties with Pacific islands have suffered a major blow on the eve of its landmark summit, with Solomon Islands rejecting a draft US agreement, and Micronesian leaders raising serious concerns about "insufficient" financial assistance to the region, leaked documents obtained by the Guardian reveal.</p> <p>Joe Biden is hosting a number of Pacific leaders in Washington for a US-Pacific Islands summit, which starts on Wednesday – the first time that Pacific leaders have been invited to the White House for such a meeting.</p> <p>The summit is an attempt by the US to strengthen ties with Pacific countries and has been widely seen as a response to China's growing engagement in the region.</p>

However, the US's offering to the region has sparked consternation among Pacific leaders.

A leaked note, written by the embassy of Solomon Islands in New York, announced the country, which signed a controversial security deal with China in April, would not be endorsing a regional diplomatic agreement being proposed by the US.

"Solomon Islands is not in a position to adopt the declaration this week and will need time to reflect on the declaration and refer the declaration through Solomon Islands' national decision making process," says the note, which was addressed to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and seen by the Guardian. "Solomon Islands note that the declaration remains under discussion and have yet to enjoy consensus and will need further discussion."

The proposed declaration is in the process of being negotiated and the US was hoping it would be adopted by Pacific leaders at this week's summit.

A source involved in the negotiations told the Guardian that Pacific Island leaders were going to meet on Tuesday night in New York to discuss the declaration, but the meeting was deferred by the Solomon Islands delegation.

The 11-point declaration of US-Pacific partnership, a draft of which has been seen by the Guardian, commits Pacific countries and the US to working together "in the face of a worsening climate crisis and an increasingly complex geopolitical environment".

The draft differs markedly from the [sweeping regional economic and security deal](#) that China presented to 10 Pacific countries earlier this year, which was ultimately rejected by Pacific leaders.

China's deal was incredibly detailed, committing to particular sums of money, programs and even outlining the number Chinese art troupes that would be sent to the islands as part of a cultural exchange program.

It also would have seen a massive expansion of China's involvement in security arrangements in the region, including expanding its training of police forces, constructing laboratories for fingerprint testing, forensic autopsy, drugs, electronic and digital forensics, and strengthening cooperation on cybersecurity.

The draft declaration with the US is far more general, committing to principles of engagement – such as bolstering Pacific regionalism, tackling the climate crisis, advancing economic growth, protecting the Blue Pacific and maintaining peace and security – rather than outlining specific policies and promises.

'US economic assistance is insufficient'

The first point in the draft Declaration details the US's commitment to "the timely and successful completion of negotiations relating to the Compacts of Free Association with the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau".

The US has Compact of Free Association agreements with these Pacific nations, which obliges the US government to provide financial assistance to them in exchange for defence responsibilities. Agreements are currently under negotiation, with the Marshall Islands' and Federated States of Micronesia compacts due to expire next year.

In the draft declaration, the US called these compacts "one of the cornerstones of US-Pacific cooperation for nearly four decades" and committed to resolving negotiations in a way "that adequately address and meet the priority needs of those three nations".

However, the Guardian has also obtained a leaked letter sent by ambassadors for Palau, the Federated States of Marshall Islands and the Marshall Islands to Kurt Campbell, the US National Security Council

coordinator for Indo-Pacific, and one of Biden’s most senior foreign policy advisers, raising concerns about what has been offered by the US.

“The current proposed assistance is inconsistent with the contributions of our islands towards the security and stability of the region, which also supports US interests in the region,” said the letter, sent on Monday. “The US proposed economic assistance seems predetermined and based on insufficient analysis ... To put it simply: the US economic assistance is insufficient.”

The ambassadors made it clear that the US “has been, is, and will continue to be our first and foremost ally” but also that “the governments we represent cannot rely on a successful outcome from what has been presented” in negotiations.

“The gaps between the needs of our peoples and what has been offered are narrowed, but are far from closed,” said the letter.

The impacts of the climate crisis are being acutely felt across the Pacific, including in the north Pacific nations of Palau, FSM and Marshall Islands. [A report from the World Bank last year](#) found that 40% of the buildings in the Marshall Islands’ capital of Majuro would be permanently flooded and entire islands would disappear, based on projections of one-metre sea level rise.

“Our remarks may come across as heated, but the primary point is that this [climate change] is our hottest and most important topic,” said the ambassadors in the leaked note. “We are unable to solve climate change, and unable to provide for our citizens’ education and health needs, unless and until these negotiations conclude, and conclude in such a manner that genuinely meet our development needs.”

Richard Clark, the press secretary for President David Panuelo of the Federated States of Micronesia, said that FSM considered the US, Palau and Marshall Islands to be “family”.

“We are a healthy and functional family, and we are internally discussing sensitive issues with frankness because we have no doubt that we collectively have each other’s backs,” he said.

The president of Palau, the foreign minister of the Marshall Islands and the US National Security Council could not immediately be reached for comment.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 King Co. budget shortfalls; plan: raise taxes
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/king-county-budget-plan-has-money-for-housing-environment-but-shortfalls-loom/
GIST	<p>King County would spend hundreds of millions on clean energy and affordable housing programs, Executive Dow Constantine proposed Tuesday, even as he warned that the county faces budget shortfalls without changes from the state.</p> <p>Constantine unveiled his proposed \$15.8 billion two-year budget Tuesday, with hundreds of millions of dollars for housing, electric buses, habitat restoration and measures to fight homelessness.</p> <p>He also announced a tentative collective bargaining agreement with the union representing King County sheriff’s deputies and sergeants that could clear the way for the use of body cameras. County officials have been pushing for body cameras on deputies for nearly a decade.</p> <p>Constantine’s proposals are subject to the approval of the Metropolitan King County Council, which will consider and amend the budget over the next eight weeks.</p> <p>In presenting the budget Tuesday, Constantine framed it as part of an “equitable recovery” from the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>

“In this budget we advance our enterprise-wide commitments,” he said, “to continuous improvement, to equity and anti-racism, and to bold action against the looming climate crisis.”

But Constantine also warned the county’s \$2.3 billion general fund budget faces deficits of \$80 million to \$100 million in 2025 unless the state changes how counties can collect property taxes. Those deficits, he said, would mean the elimination of as many as 350 jobs.

State law limits counties to no more than 1% annual growth in the overall amount of property tax they collect (plus the value of new construction). With inflation growing much faster than 1%, and with property tax the largest source of income for the county’s budget, expenses are far outpacing revenue, Constantine said.

A longtime bugbear of local progressives, the 1% cap was originally passed in a 2001 statewide initiative led by anti-tax activist Tim Eyman. It was struck down by courts, but the Legislature enacted it in 2007.

Constantine, who has previously [expressed an interest in running for governor](#), said the county would once again lobby for changes to the cap on property tax growth and other, more progressive revenue options.

“With the continuing absurdities of Washington state’s regressive tax system causing county revenues to fall far behind inflation and population growth, hundreds of millions of dollars in worthy requests for urgent needs were simply left behind,” Constantine said.

The general fund pays for things like courts, jails, elections and property assessments, many of which are required by state law.

More discretionary proposals in Constantine’s budget include more than \$220 million for electric buses and infrastructure to convert King County Metro’s 1,400 bus fleet to all-electric by 2035. The county would spend an additional \$27 million on charging infrastructure to electrify half of its light-duty vehicle fleet by 2025.

It would spend \$28 million to remove blockages from local rivers and streams, with the goal of easing salmon migration that’s been disrupted by construction. Another \$23 million would go to removing excess nitrogen and other nutrients from wastewater. And \$60 million would go toward land conservation, buying and preserving what Constantine has called “[the last, best” natural places](#), part of a larger program that voters will [weigh in on in November](#).

A federally funded low-interest loan program would [help homeowners convert from oil and gas furnaces](#) to electric heat pumps.

Constantine has spent the past several weeks unveiling several of the higher-profile proposals embedded in the budget.

Those include the continued operation of 10 former hotels and nursing homes that the county has purchased to eventually provide 1,600 housing units with on-site case management, counseling and health services. The budget includes a plan to sell \$45 million in bonds — backed by hotel tax revenue — to build affordable housing near public transit stations. It also includes more than \$20 million in rental assistance funds and \$28 million to help people getting rental assistance with transportation and other essential needs.

The budget would continue funding the King County Regional Homelessness Authority, contributing \$96 million to [the coalition of local governments that’s supposed to coordinate](#) homelessness strategy.

On Monday, Constantine announced a plan to ask voters to raise property taxes to fund up to \$1.25 billion over a decade for [five mental health crisis care centers spread across the county](#).

	<p>The budget includes \$5 million to buy body cameras for sheriff's deputies, which, along with a planned \$1 million from the federal government, officials say would be enough to launch the program. Millions more will be required for data and video storage and management.</p> <p>And it includes millions of dollars for alternatives to traditional law enforcement and incarceration, as it seeks to boost the depleted staffs of both the county sheriff and county correctional facilities.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Protesters decry CID 'homeless megaplex'
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/protesters-want-king-county-rethink-developing-homeless-megaplex/LSLOYRNTARDOFKTTE3KBY6EODM/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — Outraged over the development of what they call a “homeless megaplex”, more than 100 protesters from Seattle’s Chinatown-International District marched into a King County Council meeting.</p> <p>Just before noon, a group of more than 100 gathered in Hing Hay Park. Grassroots organizers hastily handed out translated call-and-response cards for the walk ahead. Gei Chan was among those leading the pack. Chan says they’re not here because they want to oust the unhoused from the neighborhood. For Chan and others, its about feeling voiceless.</p> <p>“So it’s not at all against homeless (people). I know some people are trying to paint it that way, but its not,” said Chan. “Everybody here is just asking, can the city, can the county, can government take care of us?”</p> <p>On May 3, King County Council approved a \$54 million dollar lease of nearly seven acres across the street from Uwajimaya. There’s already a shelter space off Sixth Avenue South run by the Salvation Army, but this investment would expand that offering by more than 400 additional beds. Protesters claim they were never consulted; specifically, residents who don’t speak English.</p> <p>“They only found out a few weeks ago and they’re really upset,” said Chan. “Why didn’t you just talk to us?”</p> <p>An estimated 60 people signed up to speak at the county council meeting Tuesday. Many comments were directed specifically at council member Joe McDermott, who represents this area.</p> <p>McDermott declined an on-camera interview with KIRO 7, but said in a statement, in part:</p> <p>“The CID deserves safety and security so that the community can thrive. We’ve also seen an exponential increase in unhoused individuals in the same stretch of time, and these individuals deserve the most robust support we can offer, as a community and region, to be housed, stable and secure.”</p> <p>The CID is a community area that includes the neighborhoods of Little Saigon, Japantown, and Chinatown.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 WSP apologizes after I-90 closure debacle
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/wsp-apologizes-after-i-90-road-closure-causes-huge-impact/BIFLSW6SOJGI7DFKXHIUGOPAGM/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — Washington State Patrol issued an apology after a really tough weekend during the closure of the westbound Interstate 90 floating bridge.</p> <p>State patrol sent out a letter on behalf of Captain Ron Mead, commander of operations in King County, that said, in part, “after learning of the unintended but enormous impacts this closure was having on people reaching Mercer Island Friday afternoon, the WSP and Washington State Department of Transportation</p>

	<p>began working with the Mercer Island Police Department to mitigate these impacts, but regretfully the volume of traffic made these mitigation efforts challenging at best.”</p> <p>State patrol said it had regular meetings with WSDOT and Mercer Island officers over the weekend on how the closure would be managed but their efforts “fell short of public expectation(s).”</p> <p>WSP said it did not want to point fingers or lay blame as to what caused the situation.</p> <p>WSP said it was a complicated project and some of the issues “now seem obvious.”</p> <p>“Suffice it to say, we now recognize that we could collectively have done better in all aspects leading up to and after the closure and that we (WSP/WSDOT) grossly underestimated the impacts this closure would have on traffic and more importantly, those stuck in it,” a letter from WSP stated in part.</p> <p>Officials said they failed to meet their goals for the closure and will address lessons learned for better management and mitigation of such closures in the future.</p> <p>The letter ended by saying, “We can and must do better.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Spokane area tops record heat temperature
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/weather/krem-2-weather-forecast/293-a0f43ff2-aa37-4afc-bcfc-b661849f38c1
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The Inland Northwest watched temperatures climb about 20 degrees above normal on Tuesday. In Spokane, the high of 90 degrees Tuesday breaks a couple long-standing records. One for the daily high temp, the other for the latest in the year Spokane ever hit 90 degrees. It's not just Spokane, long-standing records fell in other communities as well.</p> <p>Wednesday will be slightly cooler with increasing clouds in the afternoon and evening. The incoming shift in the weather pattern will drop temperatures by about 8-10 degrees across the region. To put that in perspective, near 80 on Wednesday in Spokane is still more than 10 degrees above normal.</p> <p>A cold front moving through early Thursday will bring a serious drop in temperatures and the potential for a little rain. We will likely see a few scattered showers Thursday with temps topping out in the low to mid 60s. Believe it or not, that is where our average temperatures sit this time of year.</p> <p>The cool down doesn't last long. 70s and sun return later this week and take us through the weekend! Keep in mind this is the time of year we lose heat the fastest. That means this warm weather will be gone before you know it!</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 New agency to probe police deadly force
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/washington/new-washington-state-agency-deadly-use-of-police-force-spokane/293-d0744658-b8a0-475b-a8d0-944fd9a6a231
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The director of Washington state's new Office of Independent Investigations is in Spokane this week meeting with groups and agencies his office will soon be working with.</p> <p>The state's legislature created the Office of Independent Investigations in May 2021. It's considered the first independent agency in the country that will take use of force investigations out of the hands of law enforcement.</p> <p>Director Roger Rogoff said this is an important change.</p>

"An independent team not connected to law enforcement during the investigations provides not only independence, but an appearance of independence as well, which is so important for the community to see," Rogoff said.

This is a brand-new state agency. Right now, it's focusing on hiring staff and establishing its policies and protocol. That means it has not yet started any investigations.

"We are not going to do investigations until we're ready to do well," Rogoff said.

Currently, an officer's deadly use of force is investigated by a third-party law enforcement agency, or the SIIR team. Once the OII is ready, it has the authority take over an investigation from the SIIR team. Then, it will compile a public report that includes a legal analysis and potential charges. But, it won't make an official recommendation to the prosecuting agency.

"In order to make sure that there's justice there has to be truth first to understand what happened, but there has to be a common understanding," Rogoff said. "And our agency is set up and designed, and hopefully ready, to provide that clarity as much as much as possible."

The Office of Independent Investigations can also reopen or review old deadly-use-of-force cases, but only if new evidence is brought forward.

"What I can promise is that we will uncover every rock, we will look under every possible factual question. We will do our best to answer the final decision as to what the results should be to that prosecutor." Rogoff said.

The agency will have six satellite offices across the state staffed with investigation teams. Director Rogoff said one of those will be in Spokane.

The agency will also have family liaisons. These liaisons will keep families, who are impacted by officer involved shootings, updated on the investigation.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Cuba power grid fails in wake Hurricane Ian
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/us/hurricane-ian-cuba.html
GIST	<p>HAVANA — Hurricane Ian lashed Cuba on Tuesday with heavy rain and winds of up to 125 miles per hour, knocking out power to the entire island and killing two people, according to the authorities.</p> <p>The Ministry of Mines and Energy said the power grid had collapsed in the wake of the storm, leaving the country in the dark as it tried to recover from heavy flooding and extensive damage. Before the sun set, residents braved wind and rain to search for food and basic supplies, lining up under overhangs to buy a piece of chicken or a bottle of oil.</p> <p>At least two people were killed, according to local news reports. One was a man in San Juan y Martínez who was electrocuted while trying to disconnect a wind turbine that he used to irrigate his field. The second was a 43-year-old woman who died in San Luis when one of the walls of her house collapsed.</p> <p>Cuba's western provinces, where the hurricane made landfall, have been the hardest hit. Videos shared on social media from the town of Coloma, along Cuba's southern coast, showed people inside their homes with water up to their knees.</p> <p>The hurricane comes as Cuba continues to recover from one of the worst periods of financial hardship in the country's history, with the nation's ailing infrastructure already producing widespread power blackouts. The financial misery, along with ongoing political repression, sparked one of the largest protest movements in decades last year.</p>

	<p>The island has long borne the brunt of Atlantic storms. In 2008, two hurricanes, Gustav and Ike, blasted across the country, leaving at least seven people dead, damaging crops and buildings, and setting off more than 150 landslides in Havana.</p> <p>On Tuesday, flooding in western Cuba damaged houses and tobacco crops, an important agricultural industry. In the municipality of San Luis, north of the city of Santiago de Cuba, one of the largest tobacco growing areas had been decimated.</p> <p>Thousands of families were evacuated and widespread power outages were reported in the western city of Pinar del Río. Tourists in places like Varadero, a popular beach resort in the country's north, were relocated to more secure locations.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/28 Florida Keys begin to feel storm's effects
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/09/28/us/hurricane-ian-florida#the-florida-keys-begin-to-feel-the-storms-effects
GIST	<p>Ian brought flooding to the Florida Keys overnight, as forecasters warned that the impact of rising waters there could worsen over the coming hours.</p> <p>The eye of the storm was not passing directly over the Florida Keys. The winds there overnight — including gusts of over 60 miles per hour in Key West — were less powerful than those forecast for parts of mainland Florida's west coast later on Wednesday.</p> <p>Still, a central concern in the Keys and beyond is that a combination of high tides and rising waters from the storm could cause dangerous flooding in residential areas.</p> <p>In the lower Florida Keys, a storm surge warning was in effect early Wednesday, hours after a tide gauge at Key West began recording a water level that was about 2.5 feet above normal.</p> <p>The lower Keys were forecast to see storm surges of two to four feet if a peak surge occurred around the same time as a high tide, the National Hurricane Center said. The next high tide in Key West will be at 12:30 p.m. Eastern time on Wednesday.</p> <p>As of early Wednesday morning, no mandatory evacuation orders had been issued for Monroe County, which includes the Florida Keys and sits at the very tip of southern Florida.</p> <p>Some residents of Key West, the county seat, were watching the storm arrive at their doorsteps.</p> <p>Dylon Estevez, 29, said that water began seeping into his ground-floor apartment there around 9:30 p.m. on Tuesday. Within an hour, it rose to about 15 inches.</p> <p>"It was fast and kind of out of nowhere," he said, recalling that a couple of hours earlier, the wind gusts were strong but the rain seemed light. He had not been paying attention to the rising tide, he said.</p> <p>Mr. Estevez and his roommate shut off power to the apartment, stashed what belongings they could on higher perches and sloshed through waist-deep water to get to higher ground with his roommate's dog, Rookie. With most streetlights out, residents would not be able to see the full extent of the damage until dawn, he said.</p> <p>"Our whole neighborhood, any house on the first floor is going to be pretty engulfed in water," said Mr. Estevez, a lifelong Key West resident.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Inflation hit tenants hard; landlords?
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/business/economy/landlords-rent-inflation.html
GIST	<p>Of all the categories driving inflation in recent months, among the largest — and most persistent — is rent.</p> <p>In buildings with more than 50 units, tenants in one-bedroom apartments have been handed new leases costing about 17 percent more on average than they did in March 2020, according to CoStar Group, a Washington-based real estate data company. The Labor Department’s rent indicator — which includes ongoing leases, not just renewals — has steadily risen, to 6.7 percent last month over the previous August.</p> <p>So while tenants absorb rent increases that often exceed their income gains, are landlords minting money? It depends on the landlord.</p> <p>Publicly traded owners of sprawling real estate portfolios, like Invitation Homes, have enjoyed some of their best returns over the past few quarters. Things look very different, however, for Neal Verma, whose company manages 6,000 apartments in the Houston area.</p> <p>Earlier this year, Mr. Verma experimented with raising rents enough to cover the cost of spiking wages, property taxes, insurance and maintenance. Turnover doubled in the properties where he tried it, as people left for nearby buildings.</p> <p>“It’s crushing our margins,” Mr. Verma said. “Our profits from last year have evaporated and we’re running at break-even at a number of properties. There’s some people who think landlords must be making money. No. We’ve only gone up 12 to 14 percent, and our expenses have gone up 30 percent.”</p> <p>Overall, the ferocious run-up in rents has been driven by tenants’ desire for more space and location flexibility created by remote work; rising interest rates that have locked would-be buyers out of the for-sale market; and cost increases on delayed maintenance. But the one factor landlords track most closely is their customers’ ability to absorb higher rents.</p> <p>Higher-earning tenants, who flock to newer buildings with more amenities, have been more willing to accept rent increases. Low-income renters, while seeing faster wage growth, have borne the brunt of higher prices for necessities like groceries and gasoline, and rents in older buildings are rising at a slower rate than newer, nicer ones.</p> <p>“The reality is that rents can only rise as incomes rise,” said Jay Parsons, chief economist at the real estate data firm RealPage, noting that rent averages 23 percent of the monthly incomes across the apartments they track. “If people can’t afford it, you can’t lease it.”</p> <p>Geography also matters. Even among the largest landlords, those with a presence in Sun Belt cities such as Miami, Tampa, Nashville and Phoenix saw far faster rent growth than high-cost coastal markets like San Francisco, where rents fell substantially during the pandemic lockdowns as white-collar workers fled for remote locations.</p> <p>Mid-America Apartment Communities, a publicly traded owner of 101,000 units concentrated in Georgia, Texas, Florida and North Carolina, has benefited from all these trends. Its new tenants make \$91,319 on average and are in their mid-30s. In the first half of the year, its new and renewed leases increased 17.1 percent over their previous rates, driving the largest increase in its dividend per share in decades.</p> <p>“We feel very good about the opportunity for pricing going forward and still believe now is the time to push rate versus volume,” said Tom Grimes, the company’s chief operating officer, explaining to investors on a quarterly earnings call that he’d rather raise prices than worry about turnover, which remains low. “Demand is good, and our priority is for growing rents.”</p> <p>It’s harder to track the finances of privately owned real estate portfolios, which can range from a few hundred to a few thousand units — midsize landlords, in relative terms. But interviews suggest that even if they remain profitable, rising expenses have weighed more heavily on their bottom lines.</p>

Take Swapnil Agarwal, whose Houston-based Nitya Capital has grown swiftly to encompass 20,000 units. He says insurance premiums, payroll costs and maintenance have combined to push his expenses to \$7,000 per unit this year from \$5,500 in recent years.

“It’s ironic, because our net operating margins have not gone up, actually they’ve gone down,” Mr. Agarwal said. The picture may improve as he renews leases at market rates. “Yes, the rent growth is there,” he said, “but it has to sustain there for a while because of the costs going up.”

Many midsize landlords are also in the business of acquiring, renovating and building apartments. Rising interest rates have made that much more difficult.

Steve Schwat is a principal at UIP Asset Management, which owns a portfolio of buildings in Washington, a market that has been resilient to economic cycles but [hasn’t seen outsize rent growth](#) after the early days of the pandemic. For him, the costs of financing and construction wipe out the upside of high occupancy rates and rising rents.

“I think this inflationary environment is a more negative to landlords than it is a positive,” Mr. Schwat said. “Most landlords would tell you, ‘I really liked 2021.’ Things were coming back, interest rates were low, things seemed to be going relatively easy; 2022 is a bitch.”

For those operating on an even smaller scale, cost increases can push landlords into the red, at least temporarily.

Early in the pandemic, many small landlords gave their tenants a break on rent. Some [put off nonessential repairs](#), reducing their expenses. The net effect, according to a JPMorgan Chase [analysis](#) of its customers’ business checking accounts, was that their account balances stayed approximately level.

But those costs didn’t go away. Fixing appliances and upgrading heating and air-conditioning systems just had to wait until revenues resumed flowing and health concerns abated, making tenants less concerned about having contractors in their homes.

More recently, smaller landlords have been asking for lower-than-market-rent increases. Adjusted for inflation, [rental income paid to noncorporate landlords](#) still hasn’t reached its prepandemic level.

According to the Urban Institute’s [analysis](#) of data collected in April by an online property management platform, nearly a quarter of those with more than 10 units planned to increase the rent by more than 10 percent, while nearly half of landlords with only one unit weren’t planning to raise rents at all. That can also make financial sense: Finding a new tenant when someone leaves is much more costly when it’s your entire rental income.

“It’s not all good will — they have different incentives from the bigger players,” said Jung Hyun Choi, senior research associate at the Urban Institute, a research organization.

Allison Drescher, the president of an association representing independent landlords in Boston who also manages an apartment portfolio, polled 29 members of her network last week and found that a majority had not increased rents on average across their properties since the pandemic. Of the third who had, none had done so by more than 10 percent.

But after the frigid winter, that might change, given the ballooning cost of heating oil. “When you have a cost increase that dramatic, you’re having landlords either pass through the cost of heating or hot water to the tenants, or raising their rent, or selling their property,” Ms. Drescher said.

Another dividing line: Landlords concentrated in lower-income housing collected less rent from people who lost jobs during the pandemic, and didn’t always recoup all their losses through the federal [Emergency Rental Assistance Program](#).

Ryan Vienneau has a close-up view of that segment of the market. He and his wife own 11 apartments in and around Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and manage 300 other units. For their clients a rental assistance case has meant no income for months, and sometimes only a partial reimbursement, if any.

“It was really like roulette,” Mr. Vienneau said. “If you just happened to have a tenant in an industry that was working, you were probably fine. But if you happened to have a duplex that’s your only retirement and it just so happens that both of those tenants were waitresses, you have absolutely nothing.”

Across the properties he manages, he is handling 10 eviction cases, six of which involve rental assistance, requiring hours of staff time and a lawyer’s help. With a [raft of tenant](#) protections that New York enacted in 2019, Mr. Vienneau wouldn’t recommend real estate investing locally, given the heightened risk of lost income.

“We’re in New York, and my wife and I say every day, ‘Everything in our life would be so much better if we’d found any other state,’” Mr. Vienneau said.

Nevertheless, many small landlords still seem to find the reward to be worth the hassle. In a July [survey by the property management platform Avail](#), only 8 percent planned to sell their units, half the rate from earlier in the year.

Across all sizes of landlords, one thing seems certain: Rents won’t rise at this rate for very much longer. While the Commerce Department’s Consumer Price Index will likely continue to show gains [through early 2023](#), rent increases on new leases have [slowed considerably](#).

That doesn’t mean, however, that rents will return to anything near prepandemic levels. In the short term, aside from [local efforts](#) to widen rent-control measures, the only factors likely to bring them down markedly are a serious recession and rising unemployment.

Over the longer run, the most important factor is whether homebuilders can catch up to demand.

“Whether our costs went to zero, or our costs double, it might have some effect,” Mr. Vienneau said. “But for most people, it’s 100 percent supply. That’s what’s driving rents. If there are 10 other similar vacant units available, all of our rents are going to come down.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Sabotage? Gas leaks pour into Baltic Sea
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/sep/27/nord-stream-1-2-pipelines-leak-baltic-sabotage-fears
GIST	<p>Gas is pouring into the Baltic Sea from three separate leaks on the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines amid claims by seismologists in Sweden and Denmark of two sharp spikes in undersea activity, possibly indicating explosions, and speculation about sabotage.</p> <p>A seismograph on the Danish island of Bornholm, near where the leaks occurred, twice recorded spikes on Monday, the day on which the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines underwent dramatic falls in pressure, the German geological research centre GFZ said.</p> <p>A Danish military flight over the leaks brought back striking images from the ruptures, including one showing an area of bubbling gas a kilometre wide on the sea’s surface.</p> <p>The seismograph recorded near-silence until just after midnight GMT (2am local time), when there was a spike representing a tremor in the earth followed by a continuous hissing wave form. The pattern was repeated at 5pm GMT.</p> <p>Amid the speculation over sabotage, suspicion immediately turned to potential culprits – with fingers pointed at Russia, whose pipelines were hit, suggesting a further weaponisation of energy supplies to</p>

Europe in the midst of the conflict in Ukraine. Not least it was seen as a possible message about the vulnerability of other marine gas infrastructure.

An alternative scenario could be that mines were dropped from a disguised commercial vessel days or weeks ahead of the attack, then remotely detonated to cause the explosions. But the latter scenario was entirely hypothetical, they stressed.

The day of drama began when the Danish energy agency said it had found the leaks on the Nord Stream 1 pipeline north-east of the island of Bornholm, and a third in the [Nord Stream 2 pipeline](#) in Swedish waters south-east of the island. “This is not a small crack. It’s a really big hole,” the energy agency said.

Underlining the significance of the event, Javier Blas, an energy and commodities commentator for Bloomberg, described the undersea gas pipelines in the region as one of Europe’s most important strategic assets. “The subsea pipelines linking the North Sea gas fields, and then Norway with the rest of the continent and the UK are among the most strategic assets right now for Europe. High time for maximum protection. Cyber-attacks against energy assets are, too, a key risk for Europe,” Blas tweeted.

A five-mile exclusion zone for shipping has been set up around Bornholm, and flights below 1,000 metres have been banned in the area. Methane, the primary component of natural gas, partially dissolves in water, is not toxic and creates no hazard when inhaled in limited quantities.

“Breakage of gas pipelines is extremely rare”, Danish authorities said in a statement. “Therefore we see reason to raise the preparedness level as a result of the incidents we have seen over the past 24 hours.”

Nord Stream AG, the pipeline operator, had on Monday morning reported an unexpected overnight [drop of pressure](#) from 105 to 7 bar in Nord Stream 2, which is filled with gas but was cancelled by Olaf Scholz, the German chancellor, shortly before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

A further drop of pressure was reported on Monday afternoon in Nord Stream 1, which Russia shut down indefinitely at the start of September, initially saying it needed repairs.

With three separate leaks almost simultaneously, with some distance between them, it was “difficult to imagine” it was a random accident, Frederiksen said at a short press conference during a visit to Poland, where she was participating in the opening of the Baltic Pipe gas pipeline.

Anonymous sources in German government circles also said the simultaneity of the three leaks made an accident unlikely. “Our imagination cannot come up with a scenario which isn’t a deliberate attack,” a person involved in the investigation told the German daily Der Tagesspiegel.

The news magazine Der Spiegel, quoting government sources, said officials were not ruling out sabotage, designed to cause further uncertainty on Europe’s energy markets.

Since [no gas has flowed](#) through either of the pipelines since the start of the month, German authorities have been quick to reassure people that the leaks will not affect its plan to fill gas storage tanks in time for winter.

Environmental NGOs said the leaks were likely to cause large-scale damage to the environment. “As soon as methane in gas form raises from the surface of the sea into the atmosphere, it will massively contribute to the greenhouse effect,” said Sascha Müller-Kraenner of the pressure group Environmental Action [Germany](#).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Russians at Georgia border flee draft
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/27/we-didnt-want-to-be-part-of-the-war-russians-at-the-georgia-border-flee-putins-call-up

Alexandra, 37, a lawyer from Moscow, appeared to almost astonish herself as she said it. Perhaps it was the first time she had out loud. “We have left our house, our car, our lives – everything.”

Looking down at the top of the blond head of her small child, kicking a stone at her feet, Alexandra explained that she, her husband and son had driven for more than 20 hours from Russia’s capital before dumping their car in the southern city of Vladikavkaz and going on by foot to the border crossing with [Georgia](#).

“We walked for 25km (15 miles) to get to the border with our four-year-old son, between the queuing cars, with no space and lots of fumes.” Asked what they will do next, she replied: “I don’t know, we don’t know.”

Alexandra’s husband, Artiom, 41, who works in radio technology, was at least clear as to why they were there, blinking in the bright sun, with thousands of others among the mountains on the Georgian side of the Verkhny Lars border point. “We didn’t want to be part of the war,” he said. Alexandra added: “My husband was born in [Ukraine](#). He could be mobilised and fighting Ukrainians.”

The couple and their child, with only four small bags to their name, walked on, to be mobbed by the horde of taxi drivers who gather daily at the crossing, charging exorbitant fees for the three-hour drive to Georgia’s capital, Tbilisi.

This family, exhausted and bewildered, are just three of the 10,000 Russians that Georgia’s interior minister, Vakhtang Gomelauri, said on Tuesday were entering the country daily through Verkhny Lars, a bundle of grey buildings and lanes sandwiched in a gorge in the mountains that acts as the only formal crossing between the two countries.

Before Vladimir Putin announced his partial mobilisation of 300,000 people with prior combat or other military service just a few days ago, it had been only 5,000 to 6,000 Russians a day passing through here, a vast increase on the numbers seen before the war in Ukraine but nothing like today.

Those arriving in Georgia now speak of a four-day queue for those fleeing Putin’s Russia by car. Drone footage offers corroborating evidence. It is why many opt to walk or go by bicycle.

But where there is human misery, there is also money to be made. A black market in queue-jumping has emerged for those with the means, said Vasip, 32, a self-employed builder, who had flown from his home in Kalmikiya to the city of Stavropol with his wife, Malida, 38, and their two children, five and two, before taking a car to within 4km of the border and walking the rest.

“You can pay 50,000 roubles to some people, not the police or anything, and they take you to the front of the queue”, he said, shaking his head. “That’s why the queue isn’t moving.”

Yet, despite the obstacles, Georgia’s popularity as a place of exile is growing, alongside that of Mongolia and Kazakhstan, to where 98,000 have fled in the last week.

Finland, the last EU country with a Russian land border that still allows entry to Russians with tourist visas, said last Friday that it would significantly restrict the entry of Russian citizens.

Georgia, in contrast, allows Russians to stay for a year without a visa, an opportunity that 50,000 have already taken an advantage of. Meanwhile, rumours abound the Russian government is planning to close the border with its southern neighbour and the Kremlin’s insistence that “no decisions have been taken” on martial law or border closures, has offered scant reassurance.

The appearance of masked soldiers and an armoured personnel carrier from the FSB security agency on the Russian side of the border on Monday has only heightened fears. Soldiers have also been seen at the toll crossings on the way to Verkhny Lars, with uncorroborated witness accounts suggesting some Russians had been turned back.

	<p>There is growing resentment in Tbilisi about the influx of Russians. Their money has powered increases in rent that some complain has forced them out of their homes, while many feel uncomfortable about hearing the Russian language used so liberally on the streets of Tbilisi, given a fifth of Georgia has been occupied by Russia since the short 2008 war.</p> <p>The apparent confessions of young men who claim to have been encouraged to come over in the guise of refugees only to spy for the FSB has only fuelled the distrust. The yellow and blue of the Ukrainian flag is everywhere.</p> <p>But the Georgian government has been resistant to the public pressure to restrict numbers. Emil Avdaliani, the director of Middle East Studies at Geocase, a Georgian thinktank, said ministers were motivated largely by fear. “They are basically trying not to anger Moscow,” he said. “This is a continuation of how Georgia has dealt with the situation with Ukraine generally. There is no super pro-Ukraine rhetoric or support. Surely they want Russia defeated but they can’t really say this. Georgia is not part of Nato, it does not have great allies like Great Britain. It is on its own”.</p> <p>For Genadiy Tsvetkov, 34, a manager in St Petersburg who was making his way over the crossing on his bicycle, Georgia’s reluctance to upset the Kremlin offered an opportunity that he could no longer avoid taking. “I didn’t leave in February [at the start of the war in Ukraine] as it is better to protest, to resist”, he said. “Whenever someone who does that leaves it makes the government happy. But then they announced the mobilisation.”</p> <p>“It is highly unlikely that I would be drafted but there are risks”, Tsvetkov went on, citing the vague language in Putin’s decree and the danger of an expansion of the draft. “I have a child, I want more children and I don’t want to be killed.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Highway 2 closes again because of wildfire
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article266452356.html
GIST	<p>US Highway 2 near Skykomish, Washington, is again closed because of the Bolt Creek Fire burning near the roadway.</p> <p>Three miles (4.8 kilometers) of the highway closed Monday night and was extended to 4 miles (6.4 kilometers) Tuesday morning, KING 5 News reported. On Tuesday, US 2 was closed between Northeast Old Cascade Highway and 747th Avenue Northeast in Skykomish, according to the Washington State Department of Transportation.</p> <p>The department tweeted a video showing crews working in smoky conditions cutting down burnt trees near the roadway.</p> <p>The fire has been burning since Sept. 10 and has grown to an estimated 17.7 square miles (45.8 square kilometers). Some evacuation orders remained in effect.</p> <p>A 13-mile (21-kilometer) stretch of US 2 had reopened Saturday after a fire-related weeklong closure.</p> <p>Officials said hot and dry conditions on Monday slightly increased fire behavior, which resulted in more wildfire smoke in the area. Air quality in western Washington was moderate with some areas experiencing short spikes of air quality that was unhealthy for sensitive groups, the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency said.</p> <p>A fire weather watch also was in effect Tuesday but temperatures were expected to drop with clouds and potential moisture moving into the area. That storm system should help clear the smoke, the agency said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Seattle Children’s ‘unprecedented demand’
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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/seattle-childrens-emergency-department-sees-unprecedented-demand-long-wait-times/
GIST	<p>Seattle Children’s Hospital is seeing “unprecedented demand” in its emergency department, creating long wait times and forcing providers to see some patients with non-life threatening illnesses in the waiting room, said Seattle Children’s Emergency Medicine medical director Tony Woodward.</p> <p>After an initial lull at the start of the pandemic, Woodward said the hospital has seen a steady increase of patients to the point that patient volumes have now eclipsed their previous high in 2019.</p> <p>“On a day by day basis, we’re busier than we’ve ever been,” he said.</p> <p>The demand is being driven by many community pediatrician offices being strained by already full loads or staffing shortages as well as an influx of viral-related illness associated with the fall and cold weather like the flu, he said.</p> <p>While most primary care physicians now see children with COVID-19 or have developed telemedicine protocols, at first kids with coronavirus were only able to go to the hospital.</p> <p>Now, as school and day care have resumed and mask requirements have gone away, many children are being exposed to germs for the first time in years, he said.</p> <p>The hospital serves patients from Wyoming, Alaska, Montana and Idaho. Wildfire smoke in the region has also exacerbated respiratory illnesses, Woodward said.</p> <p>The hospital has opened additional beds and increased physician staffing: It has increased the number of physician shifts from about eight or nine each day to 10 to 11, adding up to 18 additional physician hours.</p> <p>Even so, sometimes more patients come in within a two-hour window than there are total beds in the emergency department, Woodward said.</p> <p>In the past, providers have had to evaluate patients and plan discharges from the waiting room only during intermittent surges, Woodward said. Now, that has become a routine occurrence for patients who do not require nursing care or need something simple like an X-ray or Tylenol, he said.</p> <p>“We try to use every additional square foot we have to provide care, recognizing that a waiting room with other people is not a place to have confidential conversations,” Woodward said.</p> <p>Woodward emphasized that when caregivers and families genuinely believe someone needs immediate medical attention, they should go to the emergency department without hesitation.</p> <p>“We’re always available for emergencies no matter what and we prioritize waits based on need,” he said. “When patients come in and they have a dire emergency, they will get care immediately.”</p> <p>Even if the wait times are long and the waiting room is crowded, Woodward recommended that caregivers do not go home without having a provider take a look at the child.</p> <p>Aside from primary care, Seattle Children’s recommend visiting the hospital’s four urgent care locations for non-life-threatening illnesses and consulting the hospital’s guide on whether to go to an emergency department or urgent care for specific symptoms.</p> <p>In the case of a severe asthma attack, seizure or fever in an infant, staff recommend going to the hospital’s emergency department. In the case of a minor allergic reaction, diarrhea or dehydration, urgent care is recommended.</p>

	The hospital's urgent care does not provide ultrasounds, CT scans or MRI studies. It also does not provide primary care services like checkups for well children, referrals to other clinics, and physicals for sports or camp.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Seattle-area home prices take a tumble
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/seattle-area-home-prices-take-biggest-dive-since-2009/
GIST	<p>The U.S. housing market took a turn in July.</p> <p>A national measure of prices rose 15.8% year-over-year, the S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller index showed Tuesday. That was the smallest gain since April 2021, and the slowdown from the 18.1% jump in June was the largest deceleration in the history of the index, according to Craig Lazzara, a managing director at S&P Dow Jones Indices.</p> <p>While prices across the U.S. remain elevated compared to last year, there are signs that higher mortgage rates are cooling the pandemic buying frenzy. On a month-to-month basis, home prices in 20 U.S. cities slipped 0.4% in July, the first monthly decline since 2012.</p> <p>“The cooling has come hard and fast,” Stephen Stanley, chief economist at Amherst Pierpoint, said in a note.</p> <p>Mortgage rates have doubled this year, chilling the housing market, especially in West Coast cities where affordability was already strained.</p> <p>Seattle-area home prices in July were still up compared to last year but have fallen since this spring. Single-family home prices were up 14.5% from last July and down 3% from June, according to the index.</p> <p>In Seattle, that was the largest month-to-month drop since January 2009. But in 2008 and 2009, prices were also falling by double-digit percentages compared to the previous year. Today, prices are still up year over year.</p> <p>San Francisco (-3.6%) and San Diego (-2%) also saw large month-over-month declines in July. Prices in New York were flat.</p> <p>The Case-Shiller index includes portions of King, Snohomish and Pierce counties in its Seattle-area home price figures.</p> <p>Even as the market cools, Seattle home prices are still far out of reach for many. The median King County home sold for \$899,999 in August, according to separate data from the Northwest Multiple Listing Service.</p> <p>The pandemic set off a real estate boom in the U.S. that was marked by bidding wars and soaring prices. But the market has cooled swiftly in recent months. Listings are lingering longer because demand has collapsed. And fewer houses are coming onto the market, with a recent report from Zillow showing that new listings slid almost 23% in August from a year earlier.</p> <p>The result is that transactions are tumbling: Sales of previously owned homes fell for a seventh straight month in August, the National Association of Realtors reported last week, reaching the lowest level since the depths of the pandemic in May 2020.</p> <p>“As the Federal Reserve continues to move interest rates upward, mortgage financing has become more expensive, a process that continues to this day,” Lazzara said in a statement. “Given the prospects for a more challenging macroeconomic environment, home prices may well continue to decelerate.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Mayor's budget expands Seattle PD funding
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/harrells-first-seattle-budget-proposes-increased-police-funding/
GIST	<p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell's first proposed budget expands funding for the Seattle Police Department by \$20 million — largely by transferring parking enforcement back to the department — and uses payroll taxes to help fill an \$140 million-plus revenue shortfall.</p> <p>More than \$740 million, nearly half of Harrell's proposed \$1.6 billion general fund, is focused on public safety, consistent with the promises he has made in office and on the campaign trail.</p> <p>The proposal, released Tuesday, adds \$20 million back to SPD's budget, bringing it to \$375 million — marking the first increase in the department's budget since the City Council began reducing its funding after police protests in 2020. The bulk of the increase comes from shifting parking enforcement back to SPD from the Seattle Department of Transportation, where it was moved after protests called for moving some public safety response outside of SPD.</p> <p>"Too often, residents feel unsafe on the streets," Harrell said during his budget speech Tuesday afternoon, calling public safety the city's "core" responsibility. He did not answer questions after the speech.</p> <p>Chrisanne Sapp, president of the Seattle Parking Enforcement Officers Guild, said the unit is pleased with the mayor's proposal to move enforcement back to SPD. The union polled members and Sapp said she's confident the announcement will be well-received among most officers.</p> <p>"It's no secret we fought the move to SDOT the whole time," she said.</p> <p>The switch back will be easy, she said. Aside from IT and payroll, very little actually transitioned to SDOT.</p> <p>"We still work out of police facilities, our cars and our uniforms still say 'Seattle police,' we still work with Seattle police, we're still on police radio," she said.</p> <p>Councilmember Lisa Herbold suggested Tuesday that the move back to SPD may be temporary.</p> <p>Enforcement officers and the union repeatedly called on the City Council to transfer responsibilities to the Community Safety and Communications Center in 2020, so "that they could support the reimagining of public safety with their own workforce-driven division," Herbold said.</p> <p>She only "relented" and moved them to SDOT, when it was apparent, she said, that the majority of her colleagues wanted to house them in the transportation department.</p> <p>Herbold said Tuesday that she appreciates Harrell's recognition that the return to SPD may not be permanent as the city continues to develop a third community safety department.</p> <p>Harrell is asking for nearly \$2 million to go toward "diversifying" 911 response, though he did not identify specific additional alternative responses to receive that funding. A spokesperson for the mayor said the money would go to a "pilot project being created in collaboration with the city council, supporting 911 response diversification, including, but not limited to, infrastructure investments, capacity building, training, and policy implementation."</p> <p>Harrell is expected to release a framework for a third public safety department, to be launched in 2024, by the end of this year.</p> <p>The budget also requests that the City Council alter the rules around the recently established JumpStart payroll tax to free up around \$95 million to help the general fund make up the revenue shortfall, caused in part by inflation and increased spending in recent years. The city's Office of Economic and Revenue</p>

Forecasts will provide the council with an updated estimate of 2023 revenues and the shortfall in November.

Harrell’s proposal, the first biannual proposal since the city temporarily switched to single-year budgets during the pandemic, would request similar JumpStart funds in 2024 to cover another anticipated shortfall. The administration says it will work with the council on establishing “progressive revenue streams” for the 2025 budget and beyond.

The budget proposes cutting funding for positions unlikely to be filled in city departments in order to pad the general fund. In SPD, those cuts would go back to funding the department instead of being added to the general fund.

Harrell’s budget also aims to [expand the understaffed Seattle Fire Department](#), adding \$2.2 million to hire 30 more firefighters, for 90 total in 2023, and funding three additional paramedic recruits, bringing the department to eight total.

The mayor’s proposal also adds \$10 million for the King County Regional Homelessness Authority, about a 13% increase, but falling short of the roughly \$90 million the Authority requested from the city and county this summer. Most of the additional funds would be earmarked for expanding or maintaining shelters with an emphasis on tiny homes and safe parking.

Preserving existing shelter beds and tiny houses that would have been eliminated because of onetime funding was a key priority, said Jamie Housen, a spokesperson for Harrell.

“Other top priorities were to increase options to bring people inside, including noncongregate shelter capacity and creating additional spaces for people living in their vehicles. Sustaining the CoLEAD program model was also a focus,” Housen said. CoLEAD is the COVID-era extension of the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program.

The mayor’s office presented the budget to the City Council on Tuesday. The council will take public feedback, make amendments and vote on a final budget by late November.

Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda, who chairs the Budget and Finance Committee, said in a statement Tuesday that she will focus on investments for working families and a budget that works toward “a Seattle where everyone is housed and cared for, healthy and safe, and supports workers and small businesses for a more equitable and resilient economy.”

Mosqueda, who led the formation of JumpStart, said in August she would consider supporting the use of JumpStart to fill the revenue gap, if the intended spending priorities — affordable housing, Green New Deal, economic resilience, and equitable development — were maintained.

She said she believes the mayor’s proposed budget complies with the 2023 and 2024 spending plan, though she is not ready to commit to the proposal yet as she must ensure the budget will maintain inflation increases for the Human Services Department staff and other policies consistent with the intent of JumpStart.

She said her priority is to fully fund JumpStart investments and that any money over what was expected goes toward core city services.

“In a budget year with a projected 2023 operating deficit of over \$141 million, we must both do everything we can to prevent austerity cuts to core city services, while also evaluating whether the use of the higher-than-anticipated revenue aligns with our city’s progressive values,” Mosqueda said.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/monkeypox-outbreak-us-showing-signs-slowing-data-shows/story?id=90573146
GIST	<p>After weeks of rising cases, the monkeypox outbreak appears to be significantly slowing down in the United States.</p> <p>As of Sept. 21, the latest date for which data is available, the seven-day case average was 197, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>This is a 50% drop from the seven-day rolling average of 394 recorded one month ago, the data shows.</p> <p>Similar situations are occurring in cities across the U.S. In New York City -- the epicenter of the outbreak -- the seven-day average of infections has declined by 85.7% over the course of a month from 35 to five, as of Sept. 23, according to data from the city's Department of Health & Mental Hygiene.</p> <p>Additionally, in Los Angeles, the seven-day average has fallen by 80.5% from 36 to seven, as of Sept. 26, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health data shows.</p> <p>Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of preventive medicine at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center, told ABC News there are two reasons why monkeypox infections are trending downward.</p> <p>One reason is that at-risk people have changed their behaviors.</p> <p>The outbreak has primarily been concentrated in men who have sex with men, a group that includes people who identify as gay, bisexual, transgender and nonbinary, although health officials have said anyone -- regardless of sexual orientation -- is at risk if they have direct contact with an infected patient.</p> <p>Schaffner said those at risk have been inundated with information about how to reduce their risk and have followed doctors' advice.</p> <p>"There's been a terrific amount of public health education that's gone out and it's gone out particularly to the MSM community and the LGBTQ community that's been primarily affected," he said. "So, you have a target population, they've been literally flooded, in some instances, with information about monkeypox, and what you as an individual can do to protect yourself against becoming infected."</p> <p>Schaffner added, "And so a lot of the communication I think, has been successful. And here's the inferential part, I think people may have altered some of their behaviors, to reduce their risk."</p> <p>A joint survey from the CDC, Emory University and Johns Hopkins University found about one-half of gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men reduced their number of sexual partners, one-time anonymous partners, and reduced use of dating apps.</p> <p>The second reason for the decline is vaccinations, Schaffner said.</p> <p>As of Sept. 20, more than 684,000 JYNNEOS vaccine doses have been distributed in the U.S., CDC data shows. As of the week ending Sept. 10, the number of second doses administered are more than the number of first doses, meaning people are returning to receive full protection.</p> <p>Last month, to increase the number of doses available, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized a new strategy to inject the vaccine intradermally, just below the first layer of skin, rather than subcutaneously, or under all the layers of skin -- allowing one vial of vaccine to be administered as five separate doses rather than a single dose.</p> <p>"We had data that told us it would be as effective and that appears also to be working," Schaffner said. "[There's been] acceptance of the vaccine by people in the target population and we've developed the capacity to get it out, make it available easily without stigma."</p>

	<p>However, Schaffner said the battle is not over yet and there should be a sustained effort on the part of public health officials, clinicians and community leaders to keep spreading information on the seriousness of monkeypox and how to reduce risk as well as how to get vaccinated.</p> <p>"This will require sustained attention for some time," he said. "It's wonderful that things look as though they're plateauing and declining, but we have to keep attention on wherever this disease is, and we have to keep our public health and communications efforts out there."</p> <p>"It's not 'mission accomplished.' We have to keep being careful and take advantage of the vaccine," Schaffner added.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 No dramatic rise Covid cases in schools
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-cases-dramatically-rising-schools-back-session-experts/story?id=90522994
GIST	<p>Most children in the United States have returned to school for the year as districts aim to bring kids back to a setting that resembles the pre-pandemic normal.</p> <p>Masks are now optional in most classrooms and, last month, the Centers for Disease and Prevention said it was no longer recommending schools use test-to-stay, which allowed students who were close contacts of those who tested positive for COVID-19 to continue to attend in-person classes if they remained asymptomatic and continued to test negative.</p> <p>Dr. Greta Massetti, chief of the field epidemiology and prevention branch at the CDC, told reporters at the time that because unvaccinated and vaccinated people were no longer being advised to quarantine, test-to-stay was no longer necessary.</p> <p>Cases and hospitalizations do not appear to be dramatically rising and adults have the highest rate of weekly cases per 100,000, per CDC data.</p> <p>But experts said testing data is not robust as it was during the last two school years, making it difficult to compare current data to previous seasons.</p> <p>"There's good reason to be cautiously optimistic," Dr. Jim Versalovic, pathologist in chief at Texas Children's Hospital, told ABC News. "It's important to point out that we have seen over the past several weeks a steady decline in COVID positivity and in COVID hospitalizations at Texas Children's."</p> <p>He continued, "There's more at-home testing available and we don't have all the testing data, but we have enough data now to say confidently that positivity is down for COVID less than 5% in our latest rolling seven-day average and we also are now at single-digit hospitalizations, which is a big deal."</p> <p>Adults still make up most COVID-19 cases According to CDC data, weekly cases per 100,000 are higher in every adult age group compared to children. Children aged 5-11 have the lowest rate at 15.6 per 100,000 compared to those aged 75 and older at 41.6 per 100,000 with the highest rate.</p> <p>What's more, the weekly case rate has massively declined since the summer. Just two months earlier, the case rate among 5 to 11-year-olds was 114.6 per 100,000.</p> <p>Versalovic and other experts point out there are several reasons why there is not a major increase of COVID-19 cases seen among children during the new school year.</p> <p>This includes less community spread in general; schools having better filtering of air; children being able to play outside, which is less risky for spread, before it gets cold; and vaccination.</p>

Currently, 60.7% of 12-to-17-year-olds are [fully vaccinated](#), according to CDC data. This is in comparison with 47.7% fully vaccinated at the same time last year.

Meanwhile, 31.4% of 5-to-11-year-olds are fully vaccinated. While uptake in this age group has severely lagged older children, vaccination. It's a substantial increase from 0.4% this time last year.

"That was not the case a year ago," Versalovic said. "One year ago, we were still trying to get vaccines to school-aged children. We've now had those vaccines available since last November and we've had boosters available throughout the summer."

However, he said that vaccination rates, particularly among younger children have been lower than he'd like to see. Only 1.2% of children under age 2 and 2.3% of children aged 2 to 4 are fully vaccinated, according to CDC data.

"We cannot be complacent about it," he said. "Vaccination rates have not been strong as we hoped. That gives us some pause as we look ahead to the winter."

Testing is down from last year

The number of tests have declined because testing has dropped dramatically in health care settings and in schools, experts said. Schools are also no longer running test-to-stay programs, so cases could be circulating undetected. Additionally, many people do not report positive at-home tests to health officials.

"There are some important caveats," Dr. John Brownstein, an epidemiologist at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor, told ABC News. "We know that overall testing, test volume is down. Incentives for testing have changed, we've seen that reduction in test-to-stay programs."

"There is an argument to make that this could potentially be a calm before the storm as we approach colder months, more indoor activities, drier conditions that facilitate better transmission of respiratory viruses," he added.

Low rates of testing could be hiding potential surges in classrooms or underreporting asymptomatic cases. Brownstein said there is cause for optimism because a new variant has yet to emerge -- the omicron variant and its subvariants have [remained dominant](#) for almost a year compared to 2021 when the dominant variant changed every few months.

"There's a lot of room for optimism, even in the face of a surge, because of the availability of vaccines and treatments," he said. "That being said, we've been surprised at every turn of the pandemic. And so, it absolutely makes sense for us to remain vigilant and utilize the best possible data to drive decisions."

Experts stressed the importance of children getting vaccinated, especially in case COVID-19 infections do surge in the late fall and winter.

"The No. 1 tool that we have to prevent disease are vaccines," Versalovic said. "These vaccines are safe and effective and, if anything, they've proven to be even more safe and effective than we ever could have imagined over the past year."

Brownstein added that certain children, such as those who are immunocompromised or live with a family member at high risk of severe disease, may want to consider other prevention measures such as masking.

"Even if masks or testing isn't required, these are tools that can still be used as needed, depending on your sort of risk tolerance and the risk of family members," he said. "Generally, we are at a good point right now where transmission is lower and we're not facing the threat of a new highly transmissible variant, but we have to remember that we have to be flexible as we continue this school year."

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/india-bans-muslim-group-alleged-terrorist-activities-90615921
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI -- India's government banned a Muslim organization for five years, accusing it Wednesday of funding terrorist activities, providing armed training to its supporters and radicalizing people for anti-India activities.</p> <p>The ban followed the arrests and detentions of nearly 200 members of the Popular Front of India and raids on its offices this month.</p> <p>A counsel for the PFI rejected the accusations and accused investigating agencies of fabricating evidence and targeting the group.</p> <p>Muslims comprise more than 14% of India's nearly 1.4 billion people. Tensions between Muslims and Hindus have been rising, which critics of Prime Minister Narendra Modi attribute to his government's Hindu-nationalist agenda.</p> <p>The government accused the PFI of ties with the banned Students Islamic Movement of India, the Jamat-ul-Mujahideen of Bangladesh and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.</p> <p>"PFI and its associates operated openly as a socio-economic, educational and political organization but they have been pursuing a secret agenda to radicalize a particular section of the society," the government's notification said.</p> <p>The group came into existence in 2006 to counter Hindu-nationalist groups with the merger of the Karnataka Forum for Dignity and the National Development Front.</p> <p>Mohammed Tahir, a counsel for the PFI, said the government failed to present evidence of the organization receiving outside money and funding terror activities in India by organizing riots in cities and attacks on Hindu organizations and its leaders.</p> <p>Violent crimes carried out by PFI over the years included chopping off the hand of a college professor, killings of people associated with other religious organizations, supporting the Islamic State group and destruction of property, India's National Investigating Agency said.</p> <p>These violent acts "have had a demonstrative effect of striking terror in the minds of the citizens," it said in a statement.</p> <p>Critics of Modi say his Bharatiya Janata Party's landslide reelection in 2019 has emboldened the home ministry and investigating agencies to declare individuals terrorists based solely on accusations, revoke the partial autonomy of Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, and implement a citizens' registry in the northeastern state of Assam that excluded 2 million people, many of them Muslim.</p> <p>The PFI ban was invoked under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, which gives extraordinary powers to the government to deal with activities directed against the integrity and sovereignty of India. It can designate individuals as terrorists pending court trials.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/28 Cleric supporters storm Baghdad govt. area
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/clerics-supporters-storm-baghdads-government-zone-90623353
GIST	<p>BAGHDAD -- Supporters of Iraq's influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr again stormed Baghdad's Green Zone government area Wednesday as the Iraqi parliament holds session on the resignation of its speaker.</p> <p>Associated Press journalists saw those supporting Sadr waving flags as security forces gathered around them.</p>

	<p>Al-Sadr's bloc won the most votes in parliamentary elections last October but he has been unable to form a majority government. His followers stormed the parliament in late July to prevent their rivals from Iran-backed Shiite groups from forming the government.</p> <p>With ensuing rallies, clashes with security forces, counter-rallies and a sit-in outside parliament, the government formation process has stalled.</p> <p>Al-Sadr has now been calling for the dissolution of parliament and early elections and has been in a power struggle with his Iran-backed rivals since the vote.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/28 Iran in new Iraq drone bombing campaign
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/calls-iran-avoid-unnecessary-force-protesters-90621124
GIST	<p>KOYA, Iraq -- Iran launched a new drone bombing campaign Wednesday targeting the bases of an Iranian-Kurdish opposition group in northern Iraq amid demonstrations engulfing the Islamic Republic, Kurdish officials said.</p> <p>The strikes early Wednesday focused on Koya, some 60 kilometers (35 miles) east of Irbil, said Soran Nuri, a member of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan. The group, known by the acronym KDPI, is a leftist armed opposition force banned in Iran.</p> <p>Iran's state-run IRNA news agency and broadcaster said the country's Revolutionary Guard ground forces targeted some bases of a separatist group in the north of Iraq with its "precision missiles" and "suicide drones." Two people were killed and seven were wounded, according to Kurdish Brig. Gen. Goran Ahmed, chief of civil defense in Koya. The Kurdish television network Rudaw said 15 people were injured.</p> <p>The Iranian drone strikes targeted a military camp, homes, offices and other areas around Koya, Nuri said. Nuri described the attack as ongoing.</p> <p>An Associated Press journalist saw ambulances racing through Koya after the strikes. Smoke rose from the site of one apparent strike as security forces closed off the area.</p> <p>On Saturday and Monday, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard unleashed a wave of drone and artillery strikes targeting Kurdish positions.</p> <p>The attacks appear to be a response to the ongoing protests roiling Iran over the death of a 22-year-old Iranian Kurdish woman who was detained by the nation's morality police.</p> <p>The United Nations Secretary-General called on Iran early Wednesday to refrain from using "unnecessary or disproportionate force" against protesters as unrest over a young woman's death in police custody spread across the country.</p> <p>Antonio Guterres said through a spokesman that authorities should swiftly conduct an impartial investigation of the death of Mahsa Amini, which has sparked unrest across Iran's provinces and the capital of Tehran.</p> <p>"We are increasingly concerned about reports of rising fatalities, including women and children, related to the protests," U.N. spokesman Stéphane Dujarric in a statement. "We underline the need for prompt, impartial and effective investigation into Ms. Mahsa Amini's death by an independent competent authority."</p> <p>Protests have spread across at least 46 cities, towns and villages in Iran. State TV reported that at least 41 protesters and police have been killed since the protests began Sept. 17.</p>

	<p>An Associated Press count of official statements by authorities tallied at least 14 dead, with more than 1,500 demonstrators arrested.</p> <p>The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, meanwhile, said it documented the arrests of at least 23 journalists as the clashes between security forces and protesters heated up.</p> <p>CPJ in a Wednesday statement called on Iranian authorities to “immediately” release arrested journalists who covered Amini’s death and protests.</p> <p>Dujarric added that Guterres stressed the need to respect human rights, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association during the meeting with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on September 22nd.</p>
Return to Top	

Cyber, Tech Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Meta scrubs Russia network fake accounts
SOURCE	https://www.wbaa.org/2022-09-27/facebook-takes-down-russian-network-impersonating-european-news-outlets
GIST	<p>Facebook parent Meta says it has disrupted a large Russian network of fake accounts impersonating European news outlets to push a pro-Kremlin view of the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Separately, the social media giant says it also took down a network originating in China targeting the U.S. midterm elections and criticizing the Czech government.</p> <p>While the campaigns were not connected, the dual takedowns underscore how social media platforms continue to be ripe targets for efforts to shape the narratives around high-profile events, said Ben Nimmo, Meta's global threat intelligence lead.</p> <p>"There's a shooting war going on in Ukraine, there are elections coming up in the U.S.," he said. "And we're seeing influence operations that are talking about those things."</p> <p>Russia campaign targeted European support for Ukraine</p> <p>Meta said the Russian operation was the largest and most complex it has disrupted since President Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine in February.</p> <p>"You can actually sum up everything it was saying in ten words: 'Ukraine's bad. Russia's good. Stop the sanctions. Stop supplying weapons,'" Nimmo said.</p> <p>It involved more than 60 websites pretending to be legitimate, high-profile European news organizations, including the U.K.'s The Guardian and Daily Mail, Germany's Der Spiegel and Bild, and Italian news agency ANSA.</p> <p>The spoofed websites were built with care, Nimmo said, under the apparent theory that imitating a big brand would draw a big audience. They copied the layouts of outlets' real sites and imitated their web addresses. In some cases they used bylines and photos of real journalists and included working links to other news articles.</p> <p>But Nimmo said that level of detail is what doomed the operation. Meta began investigating the fake sites after journalists, researchers and members of the public flagged them this summer.</p>

"They overreached themselves," he said. "If you pretend to be Spiegel in Germany in front of an audience where Spiegel is one of the best-known brands in the country, then what you're doing is increasing the risk that somebody is actually going to look at you and say, 'Wait a minute, this is not the real thing.'"

The various fake sites ran articles in multiple languages with pro-Kremlin narratives, including accusing the Ukrainian government and military of corruption and warning of dire consequences from European sanctions on Russia.

The bulk of the spoofed news sites were German, but others imitated outlets in the U.K., Italy, France, Ukraine, and Latvia. In earlier phases, the operation created its own brands posing as news outlets, some of which were shared by official Facebook pages of Russian embassies.

The network promoted links to its websites using fake accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Telegram and Russia's LiveJournal as well as petition websites including Change.org. Many of the fake accounts used [profile pictures generated by artificial intelligence](#), and a large number claimed to work for Netflix.

"They were trying to do a kind of smash-and-grab raid on the information environment," Nimmo said. "They were trying to create these fakes and push them out so fast and so loudly that they reached real people before they got caught."

Using fake social media accounts to drive traffic to external websites has become a common tactic in influence operations, also used by a separate [Russian influence campaign](#) that Meta removed in the early days of the invasion.

Facebook removed more than 2,300 accounts, pages and groups on Facebook and Instagram, which collectively accumulated around 5,500 followers. The network spent about \$105,000 on ads promoting links to the fake websites.

These amplification tactics were crude, Meta said, with many of the posts, accounts and ads detected by its automated systems.

Chinese network took aim at divisive political issues

The Chinese network was much smaller and less sophisticated, and gained little, if any, traction. It consisted of 92 accounts, pages and groups on Facebook and Instagram that collectively gained around 280 followers.

It's the first time Meta has taken down a China-based effort focusing on the U.S. midterm elections. In the spring and summer of this year, fake accounts posed first as conservative Americans and then as liberals posting about U.S. politics, figures including President Joe Biden, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Florida's Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, and contentious topics such as abortion access and gun rights.

Meta said there were similarities to another network of China-based fake accounts it [removed in 2020](#), which posted, in part, about the U.S. presidential election.

What is different this time, Nimmo said, is the direct focus on American politics rather than critiquing the U.S. government.

"All the operations from China that we've seen before talk about America rather than talking to America," he said. "It looks like they were using these divisive issues, these hot political issues, as a window into American conversations."

The network also posted in Chinese about geopolitics, accusing the U.S. of conducting surveillance and cyberattacks against China. In a separate cluster of activity, the fake accounts impersonated Czechs, criticizing the Czech government's support for Ukraine and warning against antagonizing China.

	<p>The network posted sporadically and typically during Chinese working hours. Its posts got little engagement on Facebook and Instagram, with some other users calling them out as fake, and hashtags it used when posting about American politics were rarely used by accounts outside the network, Meta said.</p> <p>In addition to Facebook and Instagram, the network also operated on Twitter and two Czech petition websites – a similarity it shared with the Russian campaign.</p> <p>"That they're moving off social media and trying to find other platforms where they can reach people, whether they're a big operation or a small one – that's an interesting development," Nimmo said. "They're looking for a safe place on the internet where they're not going to get taken down."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Crowdsourcing effort to identify 'Metador'
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/researchers-crowdsourcing-effort-identify-mysterious-metador-apt
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity sleuths at SentinelLabs are calling on the wider threat hunting community to help decipher a new mysterious malware campaign hitting telcos, ISPs and universities in the Middle East and Africa.</p> <p>The never-before-seen threat actor, called Metador, uses sophisticated technical measures to deploy Windows-based malware implants and clever tricks to avoid detection, but despite months of inspecting the code, SentinelLabs researchers say there's still no clear, reliable sense of attribution.</p> <p>At the recent LABScon security conference, SentinelLabs malware hunters Juan Andres Guerrero-Saade, Amitai Ben Shushan Ehrlich, and Aleksandar Milenkoski shared technical artifacts associated with Metador and kick-started a crowdsourced effort to better understand the adversary.</p> <p>"We urge defenders in targeted verticals, regardless of location, to check their telemetry for the possible presence of Metador components and to share samples and indicators with the broader research community," the SentinelLabs team said.</p> <p>The research team said attempts to attribute Metador ran into multiple roadblocks and prevented complete documentation of the threat actor.</p> <p>From the Metador report:</p> <p>"Attributing Metador remains a garbled mystery. We encountered multiple languages, with diverse idiosyncrasies indicative of multiple developers. There are indications of a separation between developers and operators. And despite a lack of samples, the version history for at least one of the platforms suggests a history of development that extends far beyond the intrusions we've uncovered.</p> <p>An interesting divergence in build times suggests a possible working timezone of UTC+1. And cultural references include a Latin American cartoon popular throughout the hispanic diaspora since the 1950s, as well as a quote from a popular 80's British Pop Punk band. While the targets suggest state interests, we vaguely suspect a contractor arrangement."</p> <p>The research team said the hacking teams behind Metador are heavily focused on collection operations aligned with state interests, but noted there are indications this may be the work of a "high-end contractor arrangement" not tied to a specific country.</p> <p>A technical appendix with IOCs and analysis of the toolset is publicly available for external groups to pick apart the notes, hunt for additional components and share findings in a crowdsourced project.</p> <p>Matador isn't the first enduring mystery in the advanced threat actor space where highly skilled and well-resourced hacking teams operate.</p> <p>Here's a partial list, compiled with the help of expert malware hunter Costin Raiu, of major malware campaigns that remain unattributed, or where there are significant gaps in research knowledge:</p>

-- [TajMahal](#) -- A sophisticated APT framework exposed in 2019 that included backdoors, loaders, orchestrators, command and control (C&C) communicators, audio recorders, keyloggers, screen and webcam grabbers, document and cryptographic key stealers, and a file indexer. Despite this high level of sophistication, only a solitary TajMahal victim was found (a diplomatic entity from a country in Central Asia), suggesting a level of stealth that still leaves researchers dumbfounded. Project TajMahal also remains unattributed.

-- [Strider/Sauron](#) -- Strider, aka Sauron, was described as “the pinnacle of cyberespionage tools” that used a cocktail of zero-days and unknown, never-identified methods to deploy implants on .gov targets in several counties. The malware tools used were capable of stealing information from air gapped networks and supported multiple covert exfiltration channels on various protocols. As with TajMahal, Strider/Sauron remains unattributed, despite obvious signs suggesting the handiwork of nation state-backed hackers.

-- [The Encrypted Gauss Payload](#) -- Back in 2012, [the Gauss campaign](#) was caught hijacking passwords, banking credentials, and browser cookies from machines connected to Lebanese banks, the first signs of a nation state-backed malware campaign combining data theft with cyberespionage. An enduring mystery of Gauss is the use of a module named Godel that features an encrypted payload. To this day, no one has managed to break the Gauss payload encryption.

-- [DarkUniverse](#) -- This campaign was described as the 27th function of a ShadowBrokers script that was included in the 2017 ‘Lost in Translation’ leak and which was designed to check for traces of other APTs on infected machines. After operating a full cyber-espionage framework undetected for at least eight years, DarkUniverse’s creators suspended the work without being attributed.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Electronics, defense tech firm breached
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/israeli-defense-contractor-elbit-data-breach/
GIST	<p>Elbit Systems of America, which is the US branch of an Israeli defense contractor, Elbit, has confirmed that its network was targeted by cybercriminals in early June 2022. Resultantly, the personal data of its employees was stolen.</p> <p>The Texas-based firm hasn’t shared many details on the data breach, but it did reveal that the attack disrupted its ‘cyber operations.’</p> <p>Incident Details</p> <p>According to the breach notification issued by the Maine attorney general’s office, the American arm of Elbit’s network has suffered a data breach. Around 369 Elbit Systems employees got their information stolen by the attackers.</p> <p>As per the company, exposed data includes employee names, dates of birth, addresses, ethnicity, direct deposit information, and Social Security Numbers. The company’s spokesperson in America and any representative from its parent organization in Israel haven’t commented on the incident yet.</p> <p>Who is the Attacker?</p> <p>As per Elbit Systems of America, the investigation is still going on. At the moment, it is difficult to attribute this attack to a specific hacker, cybercrime gang, or nation-state. The company is also unsure about the objective behind this attack.</p> <p>About Elbit</p> <p>For your information, Elbit Systems is an electronics and defense tech firm. It mainly builds unmanned aerial drones, intelligence gathering, espionage, and surveillance-related systems for governments and militaries, electronic warfare systems, and similar equipment and sells it worldwide.</p> <p>The company also creates surveillance software. It acquired Nice Systems’ cyber and intelligence unit in 2015 for a whopping \$160 million and renamed it Cyberbit.</p>

	<p>As noted by TechCrunch, internet watchdog Citizen Lab's research found that Cyberbit's commercial spyware was used for espionage activities against Ethiopian dissidents in the USA and the UK.</p> <p>This spyware could steal users' private data from the targeted device, including passwords, screenshots, and emails. However, it is also suspected that the Ethiopian government itself ordered the spying activity.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 'NullMixer' dozen different malware families
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-nullmixer-dropper-infects-your-pc-with-a-dozen-malware-families/
GIST	<p>A new malware dropper named 'NullMixer' is infecting Windows devices with a dozen different malware families simultaneously through fake software cracks promoted on malicious sites in Google Search results.</p> <p>NullMixer acts as an infection funnel, using a single Windows executable to launch a dozen different malware families, leading to over two dozen infections running a single device.</p> <p>These infections range from password-stealing trojans, backdoors, spyware, bankers, fake Windows system cleaners, clipboard hijackers, cryptocurrency miners, and even further malware loaders.</p> <p>To distribute the malware, the malware distributors use 'black hat SEO' to display websites promoting the fake game cracks and pirated software activators in high search result positions on Google.</p> <p>BleepingComputer tested a Google search for 'software crack,' and many of the sites said to be distributing this malware, as shown below, were listed in our search results in the second, third, and fourth search result positions.</p> <p>Unsuspecting users who attempt to download software from these sites are redirected to other malicious sites that drop a password-protected ZIP archive containing a copy of the NullMixer dropper.</p> <p>Because software cracks and cheats commonly need to modify game files, users downloading them disregard AV warnings about unsigned and potentially dangerous executables, bypassing security controls and executing them manually.</p> <p>Kaspersky, whose analysts discovered the new dropper, reports that NullMixer has already attempted infections on 47,778 of its customers across the United States, Germany, France, Italy, India, Russia, Brazil, Turkey, and Egypt.</p> <p>Launching dozens of malware</p> <p>NullMixer is commonly downloaded as files named similarly to 'win-setup-i864.exe,' that when launched, create a new file called 'setup_installer.exe.'</p> <p>This new file is responsible for dropping dozens of malware families and, having done that, launches another executable, 'setup_install.exe.'</p> <p>That third file launches all malware dropped in the compromised machine using a hardcoded list of their names and the Windows' cmd.exe' tool.</p> <p>Some malware families dropped by NullMixer include Redline Stealer, Danabot, Raccoon Stealer, Vidar Stealer, SmokeLoader, PrivateLoader, ColdStealer, Fabookie, PseudoManuscript, and more.</p> <p>The reason why NullMixer operators chose to install and launch all these malware families simultaneously on randomly compromised computers is unclear.</p>

	<p>The operators may opt to cause destruction for fame, promote their tool as a very effective dropper to malware gangs, or achieve absurd levels of redundancy.</p> <p>Whatever the case, it would be practically impossible for all those malware families to run on a breached computer and not generate abundant symptoms of compromise for the victim to realize the infection.</p> <p>These symptoms could include heavy hard disk activity, increased CPU and memory utilization, unusual windows opening for no reason, or simply a noticeable performance issue on the infected device.</p> <p>Thus, NullMixer is less of a stealthy threat now and more of a catastrophic encounter that can likely only be resolved through a reinstall of Windows.</p> <p>Users must always consider the risks of downloading executables from obscure online sources and avoid resorting to software piracy.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/28 New 'Bl00Dy' ransomware gang in attacks
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/leaked-lockbit-30-builder-used-by-bl00dy-ransomware-gang-in-attacks/
GIST	<p>The relatively new Bl00Dy Ransomware Gang has started to use a recently leaked LockBit ransomware builder in attacks against companies.</p> <p>Last week, the LockBit 3.0 ransomware builder was leaked on Twitter after the LockBit operator had a falling out with his developer. This builder allows anyone to build a fully functional encryptor and decryptor that threat actors can use for attacks.</p> <p>As the builder includes a configuration file that can easily be customized to use different ransom notes, statistics servers, and features, BleepingComputer predicted that other threat actors would soon use the builder to create their own ransomware.</p> <p>Unfortunately, our predictions have come true, and a relatively new ransomware group named 'Bl00Dy Ransomware Gang' has already utilized the builder in an attack on a Ukrainian entity.</p> <p>The Bl00dy Ransomware Gang</p> <p>As first reported by DataBreaches.net, the Bl00Dy Ransomware Gang began operating around May 2022, when they targeted a group of medical and dental practices in New York.</p> <p>Like other human-operated ransomware operations, the threat actors breach a network, steal corporate data, and encrypt devices. However, instead of using a Tor data leak site to extort victims and publish stolen data, the threat actors use a Telegram channel for the same purpose.</p> <p>While this is clearly a 'ransomware' gang, the threat actors do not appear to develop ransomware independently. Instead, they create encryptors using leaked builders and source code of other ransomware operations, such as Babuk [VirusTotal] and Conti [VirusTotal].</p> <p>On Monday, cybersecurity researcher Vladislav Radetskiy released a report on a new Bl00Dy Ransomware Gang encryptor that was found in an attack on a Ukrainian victim.</p> <p>However, it was unclear if the ransomware was based on Conti or LockBit, as the 'filedecryptionsupport@msgsafe.io' email was previously in an encryptor built from the leaked Conti source code.</p> <p>Researcher MalwareHunterTeam later confirmed that the encryptor was built using the recently released LockBit 3.0 builder. An Intezer scan also showed a lot of code overlap between the Bl00dy and LockBit 3.0 encryptors.</p>

	<p>BleepingComputer gave the Bl00dy Ransomware Gang's encrypter a test and found some differences between this new encryptor and previous ones.</p> <p>In past campaigns, the threat actors added the .bl00dy extension for encrypted files. However, as this is not a customizable option in the LockBit 3.0 builder, the threat actors are left using extensions determined when the encryptor is built.</p> <p>As for the ransom note, the file names are still created in LockBit-style, but the threat actors have customized them to include their own text and contact information...</p> <p>Ultimately, though, this is a LockBit 3.0 ransomware encryptor, so it supports all of the features previously reported by security researchers.</p> <p>It would not be surprising to see the Bl00dy Ransomware Gang switch between ransomware families as needed to either evade detection or take advantage of various features.</p> <p>As LockBit 3.0 is one of the more advanced, feature-rich ransomware operations at this time, we should expect other threat actors to launch new operations using the leaked builder.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Fake dating, porn sites rack up \$millions
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/fake-sites-siphon-millions-dollars-3-year-scam
GIST	<p>A subscription service scam has garnered millions of dollars in credit card charges by creating fake dating and porn sites, staffing them with live customer support, and using stolen credit card accounts to pay for "services."</p> <p>Endpoint security firm ReasonLabs stated in a Sept. 23 advisory that a Russian-speaking cybercrime group has created hundreds of fraudulent websites since 2019, likely using third-party proxies, as well as dozens of business sites that act as both a generic name for credit card charges and as a hub for customer support calls. By using recurring charges that are small enough to escape many customers' notice, the fraudsters were able to keep chargeback requests low enough to avoid being shut down and continue profiting from the scam.</p> <p>While the different components of the scheme are not original, the sum total managed to bypass credit card companies' fraud detection and garner millions of dollars in revenue, ReasonLabs' research team said in the advisory.</p> <p>"Eventually, once — some of — these users find these charges, they will immediately approach the issuer for a dispute and replacement of the card number, which will cause chargebacks."</p> <p>The three-year scam highlights the resurgence of credit-card fraud, especially for businesses that are dealing with a hybrid workforce. Two-thirds of companies have experienced fraud in the past year, according to a recent study from KPMG. Security experts have meanwhile warned that third-party scripts on websites — part of the software supply chain — could be at risk of being co-opted to steal credentials and credit-card information.</p> <p>Designed to Seem Legitimate</p> <p>In the latest credit card scam, the cybercriminals created the right mix of components to dodge anti-fraud defenses and to remain unnoticed by consumers who don't always check their credit card bills, researchers said. While unsurprising, the scope of the fraud is quite brazen, Timothy Morris, technology strategist for security management firm Tanium, said in a statement sent to Dark Reading.</p>

"Real companies can run virtually, so it isn't hard to imagine fake companies running virtually," he said. "Front-end user interfaces, back-end customer support, payment providers, [and other components] give this swindle all the ingredients of legitimacy."

The business sites that originated the charges and appeared to be legitimate all have similar structure, with the organization's name, a motto, and information on how to contact support. ReasonLabs found 75 support sites, all with the same HTML code, importing the same JavaScript files, and having identical comments, the company said.

The scheme was also given the veneer of credibility by these 200 fake sites — mainly adult- and dating-themed — that supposedly were the source of the charges. While adult sites are classified as high risk in the financial industry, the combination of live sites and active business hubs helped make the scheme seem legitimate.

The type of fake site that the fraudsters used also likely made the scheme more successful, Matt Mullins, senior security researcher at Cybrary, said in a statement sent to Dark Reading.

"Dating sites, adult sites, and other services have social stigmas associated with them that puts the victim in a questionable light," he said. "This questionable light also makes it more likely that a victim will try to resolve it themselves versus calling up a customer service representative and trying to resolve it."

Finally, the criminal group uses typical credit card spending patterns to make the transaction less suspicious. Rather than use test transactions followed by large transaction, the criminal group uses recurring payments of small dollar amounts to escape notice.

Because most financial providers have strict agreements with high-risk businesses — such as adult sites — to limit the level of chargebacks, the cybercriminal group takes a variety of actions to avoid chargebacks. The fake businesses' names are fairly generic, they charge small dollar amounts, allow the user to cancel their "subscription," and have live customer support, ReasonLabs said.

"The fraudsters applied each individual customer service website for payment processing in order to distribute the chargebacks between many websites rather than just one," the company stated in its advisory. "This would ensure that their payment processing capabilities will not be revoked once one site reaches the agreed rate of chargebacks, or refunds, which is divided by the number of legit transactions."

The campaign is ongoing, but ReasonLabs has notified the companies affected by the fraud to help shut down the cybercriminal enterprise.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 FBI assists Australia in Optus data breach
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/fbi-helping-australian-authorities-investigate-massive-optus-data-breach-reports
GIST	<p>Australian telecommunication giant Optus is reportedly receiving help from the FBI in investigating what appears to have been an easily preventable breach that ended up exposing sensitive data on nearly 10 million customers.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the apparent hacker or hackers behind the breach on Tuesday withdrew their demand for a \$1 million ransom along with a threat to release batches of the stolen data till the ransom was paid. The threat actor also claimed he or she deleted all the data stolen from Optus. The apparent change of heart, however, came after the attacker already earlier had released a sample of some 10,200 customer records, seemingly as proof of intent.</p> <p>Second Thoughts</p> <p>The attacker's reason for withdrawing the ransom demand and the data leak threat remain unclear. But in a statement posted on a Dark Web forum — and reposted on databreaches.net — the alleged attacker alluded</p>

to "too many eyes" seeing the data as being one reason. "We will not sale data to anyone," the note read. "We can't if we even want to: personally deleted data from drive (Only copy)."

The attacker also apologized to Optus and to the 10,200 customers whose data was leaked: "Australia will see no gain in fraud, this can be monitored. Maybe for 10,200 Australian but rest of population no. Very sorry to you."

The apology and the attacker's claims of deleting the stolen data are unlikely to assuage concerns surrounding the attack, which has been described as Australia's largest-ever breach.

Optus [first disclosed the breach on Sept. 21](#), and in a series of updates since then has described it as affecting current and previous customers of the company's broadband, mobile, and business customers from 2017 onward. According to the company, the breach may have potentially exposed customer names, dates of birth, phone numbers, email addresses, and — for a subset of customers — their full addresses, driver's license information, or passport numbers.

Optus Security Practices Under the Microscope

The breach has stoked concerns of widespread identity fraud and pushed Optus into — among other measures — working with different Australian state governments to discuss the potential for changing driver's license details of affected individuals at the company's cost. "When we get in touch, we'll place a credit on your account to cover any relevant replacement cost. We'll do this automatically, so you don't need to contact us," Optus informed customers. "If you don't hear from us, it means that your driver's license doesn't need to be changed."

The data compromise has put Optus security practices squarely under the spotlight especially because it appears to have resulted from a fundamental error. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) on Sept. 22 [quoted an unidentified "senior figure"](#) inside Optus as saying the attacker was basically able to access the database via an unauthenticated application programming interface (API).

The insider allegedly told ABC that the live customer identity database the attacker accessed was connected via an unprotected API to the Internet. The assumption was that only authorized Optus systems would use the API. But it somehow ended up getting exposed to a test network, which happened to be directly connected to the Internet, ABC quoted the insider as saying.

ABC and other media outlets described Optus CEO Kelly Bayer Rosmarin as insisting the company was the victim of a sophisticated attack and that the data the attacker claimed to have accessed was encrypted. If the report about the exposed API is true, Optus was the victim of a security mistake that many others make. "Broken user authentication is one of the most common API vulnerabilities," says Adam Fisher, solutions architect at Salt Security. "Attackers look for them first because unauthenticated APIs take no effort to breach."

Open or unauthenticated APIs often are the result of the infrastructure team, or the team that manages authentication, misconfiguring something, he says. "Because it takes more than one team to run an application, miscommunication frequently occurs," Fisher says. He notes that unauthenticated APIs occupy the second spot in OWASP's list of the top 10 API security vulnerabilities.

An Imperva-commissioned report earlier this year identified US businesses as incurring between [\\$12 billion and \\$23 billion in losses from API-linked compromises](#) just in 2022. Another survey-based study that Cloudfity conducted last year found [44% of respondents saying their organization had experienced data leakage](#) and other issues stemming from API security lapses.

"Spooked" Attacker?

The FBI did not respond immediately to a Dark Reading request for comment via its national press office email address, but the [Guardian](#) and others reported the US law enforcement agency as being called in to assist with the investigation. The [Australian Federal Police](#), which is investigating the Optus breach, said it was working with overseas law enforcement to track down the individual or group responsible for it.

Casey Ellis, founder and CTO of bug bounty firm Bugcrowd, says the intense scrutiny the breach has received from the Australian government, public, and law enforcement may have spooked the attacker. "It's fairly rare for this type of interaction to be as spectacular as this one has been," he says. "Compromising nearly half the population of a country is going to garner a lot of very intense and very powerful attention, and the attackers involved here clearly underestimated this."

Their response suggests the threat actors are very young and likely very new to criminal conduct, at least of this scale, he notes.

"Clearly, the Australian government has taken this breach very seriously and is going after the attacker voraciously," Fisher adds. "This strong response might have caught the attacker off guard," and likely prompted second thoughts. "However, unfortunately, the data is already out in the open. Once a company finds itself in the news like this, every hacker pays attention."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Dire warnings in Lapsus\$ hacker joyride
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/lapsusdollar-uber-rockstar-breach-multifactor-authentication-weaknesses/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>AFTER SUFFERING A breach earlier this month, the ride-share platform Uber said last week that it believes the infamous hacking group Lapsus\$ was behind the attack. The incident was in line with the group's track record of using phishing to gain access to corporate accounts that can then be parlayed into broader access. Then on September 23, police in the United Kingdom said they had arrested an unnamed 17-year-old in Oxfordshire who seems to be one of the individuals previously arrested in connection to Lapsus\$ in March.</p> <p>Lapsus\$, which may also have breached the Grand Theft Auto developer Rockstar in this latest hacking spree, has established itself in the pantheon of memorable hacking groups for breaching a slew of massive tech companies, including Microsoft, Nvidia, Okta, Samsung, and Ubisoft. They did so to make money, sure, but they also apparently wanted to take the digital-teen joyride of a lifetime. Researchers say that this wild and unpredictable streak is an important key to the group's success that should not be overlooked.</p> <p>"Lapsus\$ probably aren't causing as much destruction as other actors with different motivations could, and I think that's the answer—they aren't entirely motivated by money," says Brett Callow, a threat analyst at the antivirus company Emsisoft. "They, therefore, attempt things that purely financially motivated cybercriminals wouldn't. They are more likely to be adventurous and to try things—that may not have a payoff—just for the fun of it."</p> <p>This creative enthusiasm and flair for the dramatic is an important case study. While Lapsus\$ seems to perpetrate crimes of opportunity rather than working under a mandate to target certain entities or achieve specific results, the way nation-state actors often do, their seemingly boundless success reveals just how many weaknesses are lurking in organizations around the world that have gone unexposed only because they weren't immediately useful to state-backed actors or cybercriminals.</p> <p>"I find the Lapsus\$ group significant, because they have highlighted systemic problems in real-world implementations of single sign-on and multifactor authentication," says independent security researcher Bill Demirkapi. "The techniques that they've used in their attacks are nothing new, but what we're seeing is the widespread abuse of these weaknesses and a wakeup call to organizations."</p> <p>Lapsus\$ breached Uber by targeting an individual contractor whose username and password had been compromised by another entity through a malware infection and was sold on the dark web, the company said. Lapsus\$ repeatedly sent the victim multifactor authentication login notifications until they mistakenly approved access. In a previous, unrelated attack, Lapsus\$ breached a contractor working with the authentication company Okta in an attempt to compromise organizations through the identity management provider. The tactics in both instances show that there are weaknesses in some multifactor authentication</p>

strategies and they highlight a downside to “single sign-on” schemes in which one carefully protected authentication process grants access to a slew of services. The benefit to organizations is that there's only one account to protect and manage instead of many, and this cuts down on weaknesses like password reuse. The drawback, though, is that if an attacker compromises a single-sign-on account, they gain access to multiple internal services within an organization at once.

“At the end of the day, the flexibility of how you can abuse corporate accounts to move laterally and pivot over to other applications in the cloud—there are just so many different ways that attackers can use enterprise credentials,” says Crane Hassold, director of threat intelligence at Abnormal Security and a former digital behavior analyst for the FBI. “That's why phishing is so extremely popular with cybercriminals, because of that return on investment.”

There are stronger ways to implement two-factor authentication, and the new generation of [“password-less” login schemes](#) or [“Passkeys”](#) from the industry FIDO2 standard promise a much less phishable future. But organizations need to actually start implementing these more robust protections so they're in place when a ransomware actor (or restless teen) starts poking around.

“Phishing is obviously a huge problem, and most of the things that we normally think of as multifactor authentication, like using a code generator app, are at least somewhat phishable, because you can trick someone into revealing the code,” says Jim Fenton, an independent identity privacy and security consultant. “But with push notifications, it's just too easy to get people to click ‘accept.’ If you have to plug something directly into your computer to authenticate or use something integrated with your endpoint, like a biometric sensor, those are phishing-resistant technologies.”

Keeping attackers from clawing their way into an organization through phishing isn't the only problem, though. As the Uber incident showed, once Lapsus\$ had compromised one account to gain access, they were able to burrow deeper into Uber's systems, because they found credentials for internal tools lying around unprotected. Security is all about raising the barrier to entry, not eliminating all threats, so strong authentication on external-facing accounts would certainly have gone a long way toward stopping a group like Lapsus\$. But organizations must still implement multiple lines of defense so there's a fallback in case one is breached.

In recent weeks, former Twitter security chief [Peiter “Mudge” Zatko has publicly come out as a whistleblower against Twitter, testifying before a US Senate committee](#) that the social media giant [is woefully insecure](#). Zatko's claims—which Twitter denies—illuminate how high the cost could be when a company's internal defenses are lacking.

For its part, Lapsus\$ may have a reputation as an outlandish and oddball actor, but researchers say that the extent of its success in compromising massive companies is not just remarkable but also disturbing.

“Lapsus\$ has highlighted that the industry must take action against these weaknesses in common authentication implementations,” Demirkapi says. “In the short term we need to start by securing what we currently have, while in the longer term we must move toward forms of authentication that are secure by design.”

No wakeup call ever seems sufficiently dire to produce massive investment and quick, ubiquitous implementation of cybersecurity defenses, but with Lapsus\$ organizations may have an additional motivation now that the group has shown the world just how much is possible if you're talented and have some time on your hands.

“Cybercriminal enterprises are exactly the same as legitimate businesses in the sense that they look at what other people are doing and emulate the strategies that prove successful,” Emsisoft's Callow says. “So the ransomware gangs and other operations will absolutely be looking at what Lapsus\$ has done to see what they can learn.”

HEADLINE	09/27 Stolen identities in deepfake scams
SOURCE	https://www.trendmicro.com/en_us/research/22/i/how-underground-groups-use-stolen-identities-and-deepfakes.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>In 2020, in our joint paper with EUROPOL and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) outlined the malicious uses of artificial intelligence and also predicted the use and abuse of deepfake technologies by cybercriminals. Indeed, it didn't take long for our prediction to become reality — at present, we are already observing attacks happening in the wild.</p> <p>The growing appearance of deepfake attacks is significantly reshaping the threat landscape for organizations, financial institutions, celebrities, political figures, and even ordinary people. The use of deepfakes brings attacks such as business email compromise (BEC) and identity verification bypassing to new levels.</p> <p>There are several preconditions for and reasons that these attacks have been successful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the technological pillars are in place. The source code for deepfake generation is public and available to anyone willing to use it. • The number of available images in public is enough for bad actors to create millions of fake identities using deepfake technologies. • Criminal groups are early adaptors of such technologies and regularly discuss the use of deepfake technologies to increase the effectiveness of existing money laundering and monetization schemes. • We are seeing trends of deepfake implementation in newer attacks scenarios, such as in social engineering attacks, where deepfakes are a key technological enabler. <p>Let us examine how this emerging trend has been developing and evolving in recent years.</p> <p>Stolen identities in deepfake promotional scams</p> <p>It has become common to see images of famous people used in dubious search engine optimization (SEO) campaigns on news and social media sites. Usually, the advertisements are in some way related to the expertise of the selected celebrity, and they are specifically designed to bait users and get them to select links under the images.</p> <p>...for example, shows a screenshot taken on Sept. 13, 2022 of advertisements on the German news site N-TV. We see that the advertisement features well-known individuals who are likely unaware that their images are being used. If a user selects these ads, a page with an automobile advertisement appears (as seen on the right side of the figure). Selecting a similar advertisement leads to another promotional page...</p> <p>Unscrupulous advertising groups have been using this type of media content in different monetization schemes for years. However, lately we have seen interesting developments in these advertisements, as well as a change in the technology that enables these campaigns.</p> <p>Recently, a few digital media and SEO monetization groups have been using publicly shared media content to create deepfake models of famous individuals. These groups use the personas of celebrities and influencers without their consent, distributing the deepfake content for different promotional campaigns.</p> <p>...A promotional campaign was seen on Meta featuring Chris Sistrunk, a cybersecurity expert. Notably, he was neither an endorser of the product featured in the campaign, nor did he say any of the content that was in the ad's video.</p> <p>One of the authors of this blog also saw advertisements in legitimate and popular mobile applications which used not just static images but also deepfake videos of Elon Musk to advertise "financial investment opportunities."</p> <p>The next escalation for deepfakes is the capability to conduct video calls while impersonating well-known people.</p>

The topic of deepfake services is quite popular on underground forums. In these discussion groups, we see that many users are targeting online banking and digital finance verification. It is likely that criminals interested in these services already possess copies of victims' identificatory documents, but they also need a video stream of the victims to steal or create accounts. These accounts could be used later for malicious activities like money laundering or illicit financial transactions.

Deepfakes in the underground

Underground criminal attacks using verification tools and techniques have undergone a notable evolution. For example, we see that [account verification services](#) have been available for quite a while now.

However, as e-commerce evolved using modern technology and online chat systems for identity verification, criminals also evolved their techniques and developed new methods for bypassing these verification schemes.

In 2020 and early 2021, we already saw that some underground forum users were searching for “deepfake specialists” for crypto exchange and personal accounts.

In fact, some tools for deepfake production have been available online for a while now, for example on [GitHub](#). We also see that tools for deepfake and deepfake detection have been attracting attention in underground forums.

Recently, a [news](#) story was released about a deepfake of a communications executive at cryptocurrency exchange site Binance. The fake was used to trick representatives of cryptocurrency projects in Zoom calls.

On the tools side, there are also easily used bots that make the process of creating deepfake videos even easier. One example is the Telegram bot, RoundDFbot.

These deepfake videos are already being used to cause problems for public figures. Celebrities, high-ranking government officials, well-known [corporate figures](#), and other people who have many high-resolution images and videos online are the most easily targeted. We see that [social engineering scams](#) using their faces and voices are already being proliferated.

Given the tools and available deepfake technology, we can expect to see even more attacks and scams aimed at manipulating victims through voice and video fakes.

How deepfakes can affect existing attacks, scams, and monetization schemes

Deepfakes can be adapted by criminal actors for current malicious activities, and we are already seeing the first wave of these attacks. The following is a list of both existing attacks and attacks that we can expect in the near future:

- **Messenger scams.** Impersonating a money manager and calling about a money transfer has been a popular scam for years, and now criminals can use deepfakes in video calls. For example, they could impersonate someone and contact their friends and family to request a money transfer or ask for a simple top-up in their phone balance.
- **BEC.** This attack was already [quite successful](#) even [without deepfakes](#). Now attackers can use fake videos in calls, impersonate executives or business partners, and request money transfers.
- **Making accounts.** Criminals can use deepfakes to bypass identity verification services and create accounts in banks and financial institutions, possibly even government services, on behalf of other people, using copies of stolen identity documents. These criminals can use a victim's identity and bypass verification process, which is often done through video calls. Such accounts can later be used in money laundering and other malicious activities.
- **Hijacking accounts.** Criminals can take over accounts that require identification using video calls. They can hijack a financial account and simply withdraw or transfer funds. Some financial institutions require online video verification to have certain features enabled in online banking applications. Obviously, such verifications could be a target of deepfake attacks as well.

- **Blackmail.** Using deepfake videos, malicious actors can create more powerful extortion and other extortion-related attacks. They can even plant fake evidence created using deepfake technologies.
- **Disinformation campaigns.** Deepfake videos also create more effective disinformation campaigns and could be used to manipulate public opinion. Certain attacks, like pump-and-dump schemes, rely on messages from well-known persons. Now these messages can be created using deepfake technology. These schemes can certainly have financial, political, and even reputational repercussions.
- **Tech support scams.** Deepfake actors can use fake identities to social-engineer unsuspecting users into sharing payment credentials or gain [access to IT assets](#).
- **Social engineering attacks.** Malicious actors can use deepfakes to manipulate friends, families, or colleagues of an impersonated person. Social engineering attacks, like those for which [Kevin Mitnick](#) was famous for, can therefore take a new spin.
- **Hijacking of internet-of-things (IoT) devices.** Devices that use voice or face recognition, like Amazon's Alexa and many other smartphone brands, will be on the target list of deepfake criminals.

Conclusion and security recommendations

We are already seeing the first wave of criminal and malicious activities using deepfakes. However, it is likely that there will be more serious attacks in the future because of the following issues:

1. **There is enough content exposed on social media to create deepfake models for millions of people. People in every country, city, village, or particular social group have their social media exposed to the world.**
2. **All the technological pillars are in place. Attack implementation does not require significant investment and attacks can be launched not just by national states and corporations but also by individuals and small criminal groups.**
3. **Actors can already impersonate and steal the identities of politicians, C-level executives, and celebrities. This could significantly increase the success rate of certain attacks such as financial schemes, short-lived disinformation campaigns, public opinion manipulation, and extortion.**
4. **The identities of ordinary people are available to be stolen or recreated from publicly exposed media. Cybercriminals can steal from the impersonated victims or use their identities for malicious activities.**
5. **The modification of deepfake models can lead to a mass appearance of identities of people who never existed. These identities can be used in different fraud schemes. Indicators of such appearances have already been spotted in the wild.**

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Phishing campaign using Microsoft Sway
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/microsoft-sway-phishing-and/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Threat actors have recently conducted phishing campaigns using Microsoft Sway and used the platform to distribute malware within organizations.</p> <p>The findings come from cybersecurity experts at Proofpoint, who released an advisory about the new threat on Monday.</p> <p>“An attacker can weaponize a Sway page by either compromising a Microsoft 365 account within the target organization (to phish more users) or creating a Sway page within their own Microsoft 365 account outside the target organization,” reads the technical write-up.</p> <p>According to the advisory, most phishing attack vectors observed by Proofpoint involved clicking a direct link to a phishing page. The company also highlighted that Microsoft typically uses a warning pop-up to attempt to discourage users from falling prey to such phishing attempts.</p> <p>“However, Proofpoint cloud security research indicates that attackers can phish users using an embed method within Microsoft Sway without a warning pop-up,” the company wrote. “This involves a user clicking on a link in an embedded malicious document within a Sway page.”</p>

	<p>Further, while Microsoft only allows uploads of media files in Sway pages (and actively blocks uploads of executable files), there are ways to use Sway to distribute malicious executables by embedding the hosted malware within the platform.</p> <p>This can be done, as mentioned above, by hosting a malicious file on Microsoft OneDrive or SharePoint and embedding it in the new Sway page. Malicious files can also be sent to users within the organization, who may open them even though they contain malware.</p> <p>“Threat actors constantly seek new ways to steal users’ credentials and acquire access to users’ accounts,” Proofpoint wrote. “As this blog illustrates, Microsoft Sway serves as a suitable platform for various forms of cloud attacks since it’s a legitimate application hosted on a seemingly benign domain.”</p> <p>To mitigate the impact of these threats, Proofpoint recommended companies educate users to be aware of Microsoft Sway–based embedded phishing and malware risks and, if necessary, limit the usage of Microsoft Sway in cloud environments.</p> <p>Firms should also set up comprehensive account compromise detection using a cloud access security broker (CASB) solution and isolate end–user traffic when users click on links within Microsoft Sway pages.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 Bogus CloudFlare DDoS captcha
SOURCE	https://blog.sucuri.net/2022/09/new-malware-variants-serve-bogus-cloudflare-ddos-captcha.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>When attackers shift up their campaigns, change their payload or exfiltration domains, and put some extra effort into hiding their malware it’s usually a telltale sign that they are making some money off of their exploits. One such campaign is the fake CloudFlare DDoS pages which we reported on last month.</p> <p>The attack is simple: when browsing an infected website, the user receives a notification that insists they must download a file to continue to access the content. What they don’t know is that the file is actually a Remote Access Trojan which gives the attackers full access to their system, and is likely paving the way for a ransomware or banking account attack.</p> <p>As the attack has evolved we’ve detected a number of variants with new obfuscation and exploitation techniques designed to serve fake DDoS warnings and coerce victims into downloading these malicious trojans.</p> <p>The attack almost exclusively targets WordPress websites and delivers the payload by appending malicious JavaScript into core, theme, or plugin files.</p> <p>The total number of websites infected with these new variants has been relatively small — slightly less than 1,000 websites in total. The injection was found in /wp-includes/js/jquery/jquery.min.js for almost half of the infected websites.</p> <p>The fact that the attackers are modifying their payload and going to some lengths to conceal their malware suggests that they are indeed making money off of this. Unfortunately, this also indicates that unsuspecting users are falling victim to their scams.</p> <p>New exploitation technique with fake CloudFlare CAPTCHA</p> <p>In the initial wave of this infection the user was prompted with a bogus CloudFlare DDoS protection screen, but in this new wave we see a fake CAPTCHA dialog masquerading as the popular CloudFlare service.</p> <p>If the victim enters any CAPTCHA value into the dialog (even the correct one), they are then prompted to complete a download to avoid completing additional CAPTCHA security checks.</p>

	<p>Clicking on the Download button prompts a malicious .iso file to be downloaded and extracted onto the victim's machine...</p> <p>either CLOUDFLA.EXE or Cloudflare_security_installer.exe. In a further attempt to try to conceal the installation of the trojan it also launches a legitimate Google Chrome update:</p> <p>However, the updater is set to use Russian, which I expect will leave most computer users starting to second guess their browsing or downloading habits. This browser update is just a distraction, however, since at this point the RAT installer is already running in the background.</p> <p>According to Jerome Segura, a researcher at MalwareBytes, the malware is the Amadey stealer with the command & control server interestingly hosted in the United States.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Media company hacked to push racist texts
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/09/27/fast-company-hack-apple-news/
GIST	<p>Hackers breached internal systems at Fast Company magazine Tuesday evening, defacing the company's main news site and sending racist push notifications through Apple News to iPhone users.</p> <p>The two-sentence push notifications were attributed to Fast Company and contained the n-word and graphic language, prompting shocked users to post screenshots on Twitter.</p> <p>While breaches at media companies are not unheard of, the notification was one of the biggest violations of Apple's "walled garden" in memory. There was nothing to indicate that user security was compromised beyond the upsetting wording.</p> <p>"Fast Company's Apple News account was hacked on Tuesday evening. Two obscene and racist push notifications were sent about a minute apart," the magazine said by email. "The messages are vile and are not in line with the content of Fast Company. We are investigating the situation and have suspended the feed and shut down FastCompany.com until we are certain the situation has been resolved."</p> <p>An Apple spokesperson pointed to a tweet from Apple News that said: "An incredibly offensive alert was sent by Fast Company, which has been hacked. Apple News has disabled their channel."</p> <p>While the magazine's site was defaced, an article that was labeled sponsored content gave the hackers' description of how the break-in occurred.</p> <p>That account said the group had gotten into the company's WordPress program and found keys to functions including the Apple News programming interface.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Meta: China effort influence US elections
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/technology/meta-chinese-influence-us-elections.html
GIST	<p>Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, said on Tuesday that it had discovered and taken down what it described as the first targeted Chinese campaign to interfere in U.S. politics ahead of the midterm elections in November.</p> <p>Unlike the Russian efforts over the last two presidential elections, however, the Chinese campaign appeared limited in scope — and clumsy at times.</p> <p>The fake posts began appearing on Facebook and Instagram, as well as on Twitter, in November 2021, using profile pictures of men in formal attire but the names of women, according to the company's report.</p>

The users later posed as conservative Americans, promoting gun rights and opposition to abortion, while criticizing President Biden. By April, they mostly presented themselves as liberals from Florida, Texas and California, opposing guns and promoting reproductive rights. They mangled the English language and failed to attract many followers.

Two Meta officials said they could not definitively attribute the campaign to any group or individuals. Yet the tactics reflected China's growing [efforts to use international social media](#) to promote the Communist Party's political and diplomatic agenda.

What made the effort unusual was what appeared to be the focus on divisive domestic politics ahead of the midterms.

In previous influence campaigns, China's propaganda apparatus concentrated more broadly on criticizing American foreign policy, while promoting China's view of issues like [the crackdown on political rights](#) in Hong Kong and [the mass repression](#) in Xinjiang, the mostly Muslim region where hundreds of thousands were forced into re-education camps or prisons.

Ben Nimmo, Meta's lead official for global threat intelligence, said the operation reflected "a new direction for Chinese influence operations."

"It is talking to Americans, pretending to be Americans rather than talking about America to the rest of the world," he added later. "So the operation is small in itself, but it is a change."

The operation appeared to lack urgency and scope, raising questions about its ambition and goals. It involved only 81 Facebook accounts, eight Facebook pages and one group. By July, the operation had suddenly shifted its efforts away from the United States and toward politics in the Czech Republic.

The posts appeared during working hours in China, typically when Americans were asleep. They dropped off noticeably during what appeared to be "a substantial lunch break."

In one post, a user struggled with clarity: "I can't live in an America on regression."

Even if the campaign failed to go viral, Mr. Nimmo said the company's disclosure was intended to draw attention to the potential threat of Chinese interference in domestic affairs of its rivals.

Meta also announced that it had taken down a much larger Russian influence operation that began in May and focused primarily on Germany, as well as France, Italy and Britain.

The company said it was "the largest and most complex" operation it had detected from Russia since the [war in Ukraine](#) began in February.

The campaign centered around a network of 60 websites that impersonated legitimate news organizations in Europe, like Der Spiegel, Bild, The Guardian and ANSA, the Italian news agency.

The sites would then post original articles criticizing Ukraine, warning about Ukrainian refugees and arguing that economic sanctions against Russia would only backfire. Those articles were then promoted across the internet, including on Facebook and Instagram, but also on Twitter and Telegram, the messaging app, which is widely used in Russia.

The Russian operation involved 1,633 accounts on Facebook, 703 pages and one group, as well as 29 different accounts on Instagram, the company's report said. About 4,000 accounts followed one or more of the Facebook pages. As Meta moved to block the operation's domains, new websites appeared, "suggesting persistence and continuous investment in this activity."

Meta began its investigation after [disclosures](#) in August by one of Germany's television networks, ZDF. As in the case of the Chinese operation, it did not explicitly accuse the government of the Russian

	<p>president, Vladimir V. Putin, though the activity clearly mirrors the Kremlin's extensive information war surrounding its invasion.</p> <p>“They were kind of throwing everything at the wall and not a lot of it was sticking,” said David Agranovich, Meta’s director of threat disruption. “It doesn’t mean that we can say mission accomplished here.”</p> <p>Meta’s report noted overlap between the Russian and Chinese campaigns on “a number of occasions,” although the company said they were unconnected. The overlap reflects the growing cross-fertilization of official statements and state media reports in the two countries, especially regarding the United States.</p> <p>The accounts associated with the Chinese campaign posted material from Russia’s state media, including those involving unfounded allegations that the United States had secretly developed biological weapons in Ukraine.</p> <p>A French-language account linked to the operation posted a version of the allegation in April, 10 days after it had originally been posted by Russia’s Ministry of Defense on Telegram. That one drew only one response, in French, from an authentic user, according to Meta.</p> <p>“Fake,” the user wrote. “Fake. Fake as usual.”</p>
Return to Top	

Terrorism, Extremism

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Notorious ISIS 'Beatle' avoids supermax
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11252889/Notorious-ISIS-Beatle-AVOIDS-spending-life-sentence-concrete-box-Colorado-supermax-prison.html
GIST	<p>A man known as the 'Ringo' of the so-called ISIS Beatles' by prosecutors for slaughtering four American hostages has avoided spending the rest of his life at a supermax prison.</p> <p>El Shafee Elsheikh, 34, will allegedly not be jailed in solitary confinement at ADX Florence in Colorado - but instead he'll spend his sentence at a less restrictive prison on the same site known as USP Florence High.</p> <p>Elsheikh received eight life sentences after committing 'some of the most barbaric terrorist acts ever seen' as part of the twisted 'ISIS Beatles' group which captured, tortured and killed a group of journalists and aid workers in Syria in 2014.</p> <p>The terror ring gained the named because of their British accents.</p> <p>Three of the victims were beheaded on video before the sickening footage was released online by the death cult - shocking the world.</p> <p>According to The Mirror, he will live the rest of his days among a general prison population after his lawyers argued for him to avoid the so-called 'concrete box' at the supermax prison due to 'signs of mental and physical deterioration from his present and past detention.'</p> <p>A source told the paper that the victims' families 'don't know how he evaded Florence' and that it was a 'kick in the teeth.'</p> <p>The source, described as a US prison insider, added that the families 'were sure he was to see out his days at ADX, but they have now been told he has been sent to the lesser penitentiary.'</p>

While saying that El Sheikh is 'more than qualified' to be among the 'worst of the worse' who serve at ADX, 'he's avoided being kept alongside some of the world's most dangerous men and dying alone.'

Other prisoners who have spent time at Florence High include Boston Marathon Bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and Green River serial killer, Gary Ridgway.

The ADX Florence supermax facility in Colorado, would've seen Elsheikh held in isolation for 23 hours a day.

Fellow inmates at the jail include Oklahoma bomber Terry L. Nichols and author of the 1993 attack on the World Trade Centre, Ramzi Ahmed Yousef.

One of Elsheikh's accomplices, Alexandra Kotey, 38, was jailed in the US in April for his part in the killings. The terror cell also included ringleader Mohammed Emwazi, known as Jihadi John, who was killed in a drone strike in 2015.

Elsheikh, who was born in Sudan and raised in London, was convicted of conspiring to kill four American hostages: journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff, and aid workers Peter Kassig and Kayla Mueller.

All but Mueller were executed in videotaped beheadings that ISIS released online, sickening and horrifying the world.

Mueller was forced into slavery and raped multiple times by Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi before she was killed.

The deaths of Foley, Sotloff and Kassig were confirmed in 2014, while Mueller's death was confirmed in early 2015.

Elsheikh's warped crimes were branded 'brutal, callous' and 'horrific' in August as he was handed a life sentence for each of the eight counts he was convicted of in April, which are due to run concurrently.

The cell was said to include ringleader Mohammed Emwazi, known as Jihadi John; Alexandra Kotey and Elsheikh. Elsheikh was captured alongside Kotey in Syria in 2018 by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces while trying to escape to Turkey.

Last year, Kotey pleaded guilty to eight counts relating to his involvement, while Davis was jailed in Turkey before being deported to the UK last week and Emwazi was killed in a drone strike.

Kotey was given the same sentence of eight concurrent life sentences, also by Judge T.S. Ellis, at the same court in April.

Elsheikh's sentencing hearing came on the eight-year anniversary of the day that ISIS uploaded a video to YouTube showing the gruesome beheading of Foley.

Raj Parekh, the attorney representing the families, said Elsheikh remained 'defiantly remorseless and unrepentant' during his sentencing.

He said the jihadist had made no effort to meet victims' families.

At sentencing, the court heard statements from some of the victims' loved ones, including those of US journalist James Foley.

His mother, Diane Foley said: 'This trial has revealed the horrific human rights crimes you committed while part of Isis. Your hatred overtook your humanity.'

The charges against Elsheikh, whose British citizenship was withdrawn in 2018, carried a potential death sentence, but US prosecutors had agreed not seek his execution in a deal with British officials to carry forward the case.

Elsheikh's trial, and emotional testimony from the families of his victims, gripped observers on both sides of the Atlantic, and his sentencing was greeted with grim approval by US and UK officials.

'This prosecution unmasked the vicious and sadistic ISIS Beatles,' said First Assistant US Attorney Raj Parekh, noting that Elsheikh and the other Beatles always wore masks when they appeared in front of their hostages.

'This is one of the most significant international terrorism cases ever brought to trial,' said Commander Richard Smith, head of counterterrorism at London's Metropolitan Police Service, in a statement to DailyMail.com.

'These were some of the most barbaric terrorist acts ever seen, carried out with chilling callousness and brutality,' he added.

'I hope that those most affected may take some comfort in knowing that these extremely dangerous men have been brought to justice.'

He added: 'This is a time to remember all of the victims – those innocent people who were senselessly killed, and also the surviving hostages who experienced unimaginable horrors at the hands of El Shafee Elsheikh and his co-defendant Alexandra Kotey.

'They have shown remarkable fortitude and bravery in giving their accounts of what happened to investigators, and in court.'

Elsheikh is the most notorious and highest-ranking member of the Islamic State group to ever be convicted in a U.S. Court, prosecutors said.

The life sentence was a foregone conclusion after a jury convicted him of a slew of heinous crimes earlier this year.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 UK official: 32 terror plots foiled since 2017
SOURCE	https://www.gbnews.uk/news/terror-threat-remains-very-real-with-32-plots-foiled-since-2017/371113
GIST	<p>Deputy Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist, Counter Terrorism Policing's Senior National Coordinator for Protect and Prepare, confirmed that the tempo of operations remains high.</p> <p>Authorities are currently running 800 live counter-terror investigations.</p> <p>In a speech to the International Security Expo in London, the Deputy Assistant Commissioner said that many less sophisticated plots were often "harder to spot and therefore harder to stop".</p> <p>The official terrorism threat level, set by the independent Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) is SUBSTANTIAL, meaning an attack is likely.</p> <p>He added: "We must be clear: the threat remains present, ongoing, and serious and we all need to remain vigilant."</p> <p>DAC Twist said that currently, the assessment is that the terrorist threat is primarily from self-initiated terrorists who are difficult to detect and can be volatile.</p> <p>He said: "The most likely methods of attack remain low sophistication – using knives or vehicles, however we have to remain alert for more complex methods and plots."</p>

He told the conference that the murder of Conservative MP Sir David Amess in October 2021 and the suicide bomb attack at the Liverpool women's hospital in November 2021 were very recent reminders of the devastation a sole attacker can cause.

In terms of the nature of the threat, the senior officer said: "We are seeing increasingly that people are becoming radicalised online, without external plotting, support or direction.

"The scale of this was likely amplified during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the increasing isolation of many. It is not clear we have seen the full implications of this yet."

The Deputy Assistant Commissioner said authorities were also seeing mental ill health as an increasingly prominent feature in many of their cases.

He said it means police now have to deepen their work across the board with mental health services.

He continued: "These cases bring further complications in terms of instability, and can include some individuals with weaker or even mixed ideological elements."

DAC Twist said the young age of some of the suspects being investigated was of concern, with an increase in under 18s being arrested for terrorist offences.

The audience heard how the international picture has also become more complex, where the "threat from terrorist groups consolidating in the ungoverned parts of the world cannot be underestimated".

DAC Twist added: "I think we are yet to fully understand the strategic implications for the future domestic CT (Counter Terrorism) threat of the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan.

"In addition, there are other ungoverned spaces and conflict zones including Syria, Somalia and parts of Sub Saharan Africa."

The Deputy Assistant Commissioners also warned of the likelihood that many weapons from the conflict in Ukraine could eventually find their way into Western European nations, in the same way that the conflict in the Balkans led to a supply of surplus weapons for criminal gangs across Europe.

He said: "We will work very closely across policing and with security partners, particularly the NCA (National Crime Agency) to ensure that weapons from this or any other conflict zone do not find their way to the UK."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/28 NATO report: Pakistan, Taliban narco-trade
SOURCE	https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/nato-report-reveals-narcotics-trafficking-terrorism-nexus-between-pakistan-army-and-taliban-articleshow.html
GIST	<p>A NATO report has revealed the involvement of the Pakistan Army and the Taliban in an "unholy" nexus of the narco trade. The report by the Defence Education Enhancement Program (DEEP) focuses on the growth of the narcotics industry stemming from Kabul as well as Islamabad and the nexus that has formed between narcotics trafficking and terrorism. According to a 2022 report titled "Narco-Insecurity, Inc.", the convergence of Afghanistan and Pakistan in the narco-trade was made possible with the help of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's military spy agency.</p> <p>The report states that ISI launched several covert operations in alliance with sympathetic jihadist groups, all of whom relied heavily on trafficking narcotics to fund their terrorist operations, reported South Asia Press.</p> <p>Illegal narco-trade funds insurgency</p>

According to the report, the illegal narcotics trade is one of the main financial sources of the insurgency groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Moreover, it feeds narco-terror on a global scale. The Pakistan-Afghanistan heroin networks, drug lords and their nexus with the Taliban and Pakistan's military present a principal obstacle to state-building, security, and democratic governance in Afghanistan and the region

Islamabad's role in drug proliferation is validated by a number of arrests of Pakistan's nationals in various countries on the charges of drug trafficking. Furthermore, Pakistan has reportedly established smuggling networks over the last few years in India, especially within the Kashmir valley. This network ensures a steady supply of narcotics and weapons, reported South Asia Press.

Moreover, Taliban have used narcotics as their main source of revenue for a long period. After hijacking Afghanistan last year, the terror group has acquired control over the opium cultivation in the nation, reported South Asia Press.

Pakistan and Afghanistan's reliance on the narco-trade

According to a November 2021 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Afghanistan accounted for about 85% of global opium production in 2020 and supplied approximately 80% to the world's opium consumers. The total sum of opiates (Morphine, Opium, and Heroin) was 9% of Afghanistan's 14% GDP in 2020.

According to the South Asia Press, Cannabis and Methamphetamine are two other major drugs which have seen an expansion in production in Afghanistan in recent years.

Pakistan shares 2,400 kilometres of a largely porous border with Afghanistan. The border has served as a transit corridor for drug traffickers. According to the report, much quantity of the narcotics transit from Pakistan before they reach the international markets. The Meth and Opiates are trafficked from Afghanistan to the Torkham border crossing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of the county, from where they are transited to Lahore and Faisalabad, and reassembled into huge consignments, reported South Asia Press.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/28 Deadly militant attack Burkina Faso
SOURCE	https://www.brecorder.com/news/40200097
GIST	<p>OUAGADOUGOU: Eleven soldiers died and around 50 civilians were missing after a suspected militant attack in Burkina Faso's north, the government said late Tuesday.</p> <p>Violence has raged in the landlocked west African country after Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba seized power in a January coup, ousting Burkina's elected leader and promising to rein in militants.</p> <p>As in neighbouring countries, insurgents affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group have stoked the unrest, even after Damiba earlier this month sacked his defence minister and assumed the role himself.</p> <p>"A convoy carrying supplies to Djibo town was the target of a cowardly and barbaric attack," government spokesman Lionel Bilgo said.</p> <p>"The provisional toll is that 11 bodies of soldiers have been found... About 50 civilians are missing and searches are ongoing."</p> <p>A security source told AFP the toll could be as high as 60 dead.</p> <p>The convoy was ambushed Monday near Gaskinde in the province of Soum, part of the Sahel region.</p> <p>Such convoys, escorted by the army, carry essential goods to towns in the north, particularly Djibo, which are under blockade by militants who have dynamited bridges on main roads.</p>

	<p>“Practically the entire convoy was burnt,” a source said Monday. Videos received by AFP showed charred vehicles.</p> <p>On Sunday an improvised explosive device that targeted another army-escorted resupply convoy in the Sahel wounded four people, security sources said, but the convoy was able to reach its destination on Monday.</p> <p>In early September an IED strike on a convoy left at least 35 civilians dead, the governor of the Sahel region said at the time.</p> <p>More than 40 percent of Burkina Faso, a former French colony, is outside government control.</p> <p>Thousands have died and about two million have been displaced by the fighting since 2015 when the insurgency spread into Burkina Faso.</p> <p>Much of the Sahel region is now battling the insurgency, which also spread to Niger. In recent years, the violence has begun to spill over into coastal states Ivory Coast and Togo.</p> <p>“The deteriorating security situation in Burkina Faso and Mali has made the north of the coastal countries the new front line against armed groups operating in the Sahel,” the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a German think tank, said in a report in April.</p> <p>French forces supported Mali against insurgents for nearly a decade, but President Emmanuel Macron decided to pull out after France and the Malian junta fell out in the wake of a military takeover.</p> <p>The last French troops from France’s operation Barkhane left last month.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/28 Belgium police raid on extremists: 1 dead
SOURCE	https://www.ny1.com/nyc/queens/ap-top-news/2022/09/28/1-killed-in-belgium-police-raid-on-far-right-extremists
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS (AP) — A police raid targeting a group of far-right extremists left one person dead in the Belgian province of Antwerp, the federal prosecutor’s office said.</p> <p>“During the raid there was a shooting incident, and during that shooting incident someone was killed,” prosecutor Eric Van der Sypt told The Associated Press. The person wasn’t identified, but wasn’t a member of the police or security forces.</p> <p>Van der Sypt said that “a large quantity of arms and ammunition” was found during the raid, but he declined to provide further details.</p> <p>Belgian public broadcaster RTBF said that the group was suspected of planning a terrorist attack, but gave no source for this information. It said that the raid in Merksem on the outskirts of the city of Antwerp was one of about a dozen that took place early Wednesday.</p> <p>The incident is not thought to be linked to threats made against Belgium’s justice minister, who has been under strict protection since four people suspected of taking part in a plot by alleged drug criminals to kidnap him were arrested in the Netherlands.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/27 ISIS: lone wolf attacks to spark US civil war
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-khorasan-urges-lone-wolf-attacks-in-order-to-spark-u-s-civil-war/
GIST	<i>Since the last U.S. military planes left Kabul in August 2021, Islamic State’s Wilayat Khorasan has become the most dangerous Salafi-Jihadi group in Central Asia drowning Taliban-ruled Afghanistan in</i>

blood and threatening the national security of Pakistan, Iran, India, China and post-Soviet Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Along with devastating and spectacular [suicide bombings](#) against Taliban forces and Shi'a Hazaras, [Sikh and Hindu religious minorities](#), ISIS-Khorasan recently first announced its global ambitions to carry out lone-wolf attacks on the U.S. and Europe.

Abu Khuroson al-Mujohid, the notorious propagandist and chief strategist of ISKP Uzbek group, urged Islamic State supporters and sleeper cells in the West to carry out lone-wolf attacks across the U.S. and European countries. His six audio messages, "Lone-Wolf Attacks on the Dar al-Kufr," totaling 32 minutes were released by ISKP's propaganda arm, Tawhid News Media, on September 11, mocking the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

At the beginning of his speech, Abu Khuroson al-Mujohid noted that there are **three reasons** for the resumption of the ISIS lone wolf attacks on Europe and the United States. **The first reason** is aimed at protecting the global Muslim Ummah. He elaborates theological arguments from the Quran and Hadith, justifying the killing of *Kafirs* (infidels) in the *Dar al-Kufr* (land of disbelief) by ISIS Mujahideen. He argues that the Quran allows the killing of American and European Kafirs on their territory with any weapon, but without reference to a specific Surah or Ayah. In his own time, the Prophet Muhammad killed the enemies of Islam on their territory of Dar al-Kufr, sending his faithful followers there to carry out a combat mission, he said.

According to al-Mujohid, while fighting with the Mujahideen in the *Dar al-Islam* (land of Islam), Kafirs casually and indiscriminately killed thousands and thousands of peaceful Muslim women, children and the elderly, destroyed their property and houses in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Therefore, "our time has come to answer them with the same coin," he continued. He further called on ISIS supporters to kill Kafirs in the same way, to burn down their houses, as the houses of Muslims burned from their firebombs. "The life of the U.S. and European infidels should turn into hell as our *Caliph* (ISIS leader) issued a fatwa to take revenge," he stated.

He advised ISIS supporters not to hesitate to kill even elderly women in the West, as it has the same psychological explosive effect as killing thousands of Kafir soldiers on the battlefield. By killing an old woman in Dar al-Kufr, ISIS can ignite the fire of *Fitna* (heretical uprising) among unbelievers because its lone-wolf attacks will certainly sow fear, doubt and chaos in the U.S. and Europe. Kafirs cannot hide information; as a consequence, 300 million Americans and 60 million French will be under stress that day, cowardly looking over their shoulder, going crazy with fear, al-Mujohid explained the ISIS plan.

He claims that a simple throat-cutting of an infidel elderly woman could devastate the entire budget of Kafir states, as their governments will be forced to spend billions of dollars to strengthen intelligence spying on Muslims in metropolitan areas. If the Kafirs suffer unexpected financial damage, they will not be able to carry out their military operations in Dar al-Islam against the Muslims, he suggested.

Further, al-Mujohid "revealed the secret of his job" in ISIS-Khorasan related to closely follow U.S. and European social media, according to which they carried out more than 30,000 domestic operations spying on Muslim believers in the West last year wasting a lot of security effort and huge finances.

The second reason for lone-wolf attacks on Kafirs on their territory, Dar al-Kufr, according to al-Mujohid, is aimed at inciting civil war in their land. He explained this by citing U.S. domestic political issues on the eve of November midterm elections. According to him, whenever the Caliphate's followers kill a few Kafirs in their land, American society sharply is divided into two opposing camps: Racist-Nationalists and Democrats. Usually, racist-nationalists always oppose Muslim migrants, while Democrats support them. The two camps are constantly squabbling amongst themselves: racist-nationalists put pressure on the Democrats not to accept Muslim migrants, while the Democrats want to maintain their power with the help of migrants, he said.

"The Islamic Caliphate is pursuing a big policy to bring America's internal confrontations into civil war with lone-wolf attacks," al-Mujohid clarifies the ISIS goal. According to him, the confrontation between the two camps has reached such a point that in 5-6 years it could escalate into a civil war. And then it will

be the victory of the Caliphate, as the main Kafir would drown in his own blood, he believes. He then elaborated on the U.S. internal political processes, which indicates that ISIS closely monitors public opinions in the West. According to him, Grand Kafir Joe Biden is fighting against racist-nationalists, calling them “domestic terrorists.” Al-Mujohid called the January 6 U.S. Capitol attack the “fruit of seeds sown by Osama bin Laden and ISIS.” He urged ISIS supporters to actively carry out lone-wolf attacks on Dar al-Kufr in order to ignite a civil war between U.S. racist-nationalists and Democrats so that Kafirs can’t attack Dar al-Islam in the future, he concluded.

The third reason for the need to carry out lone-wolf attacks on the U.S. and Europe, in his opinion, is aimed at stopping the migration of Central Asian Muslims to the West. As he said, about 5,000 Uzbeks migrate to the U.S. each year. In his opinion, they are all slaves of *Taghuts* (idolaters) and Kafirs, whose descendants will become “*Murtaddin*” (apostate) and will protect the U.S. Democrats’ interests. The U.S. wants to rule Central Asia through these Murtad slaves in the future and destroy Dar al-Islam; therefore, the warriors of Allah should conduct lone-wolf attacks against the U.S., then the racist-nationalists and Islamophobians will put pressure on the Democrats to stop the immigration of Muslims, he said. Ultimately, ISIS attacks on Dar al-Kufr should protect the holy religion of Islam and its sacred land, Dar al-Islam, al-Mujohid said.

In conclusion, he expressed confidence that very soon the ISIS Mujahideen lone-wolf attacks against the U.S. and Europe would intensify. He asked the Almighty to increase the ranks of the warriors of Allah, who want to attack the Kafirs of the West.

Thus, the call of Abu Khuroson al-Mujohid, the key ideologue of the Uzbek-speaking ISKP jihadists, is a strategic guide for their lone-wolf terrorists living in the West. While he did not offer tactic tutorials on the methods of lone-wolf attacks, as [ISIS](#) and [al-Qaeda](#) have in the past, nevertheless he has made clear that elderly women are potential victims, perhaps believing they are more defenseless than men.

It is noteworthy that ISKP’s Central Asian hardline Uzbek, Tajik, Uighur and Kyrgyz jihadists operate in Afghanistan’s Jowzjan, Kunduz and Badakhshan provinces. They are notable by their daring bloody activity and frequent [sophisticated suicide attacks against the Taliban forces](#). Notably, Abu Khuroson al-Mujohid is the fairly well-known jihadi propagandist and chief strategist of ISKP, responsible for the post-Soviet Central Asian direction and recruiting new supporters from the Fergana Valley. He is distinguished by oratorical skills, tough Salafi views on Islam and an attempt to project the ISIS strategy in the context of geopolitical processes in the world. Due to his proficiency in English, he may have been involved in the preparation and editing of the English version of the [Voice of Khurasan magazine](#), produced by the official media arm of the ISKP, the Al Azaim Foundation. Perhaps he comes from the Andijan region of Uzbekistan, as his Uzbek is distinguished by an Andijan accent.

It became clear from his audio messages that ISIS seeks to achieve a loud intimidating effect from its lone-wolf terror attacks to instill a sense of fear amongst U.S. and European inhabitants, and the number of victims plays a secondary role.

As al-Mujohid’s audio address showed, ISIS-Khorasan is well aware of the complex nature of the domestic political rift between Democrats and Republicans on U.S. migration issues and is trying to exploit this to plan and carry out their lone-wolf attacks in the West. ISKP’s multilingual media outlets in Uzbek, Tajik, Russian and Pashtun pursue a blend of local and global objectives. Along with improving its tactical capabilities, IS-Khorasan is now demonstrating its global ambition to target the U.S. and Europe.

Therefore, following brilliant special operations to neutralize two ISIS leaders – [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#) and [Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi](#) – and al Qaeda emir [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#), U.S. intelligence should not downplay the threat of ISKP Uzbek jihadists. The threat posed to the U.S. homeland by Salafi-Jihadi groups like al Qaeda and Islamic State has not gone away. Against the background of the failure of the Taliban to unite around itself all political forces, religious and ethnic groups, ISIS’ Khorasan branch is on an ideological rise. Its recent bloody and theatrical attacks may well inspire homegrown violent extremists in the West.

HEADLINE	09/27 FBI ongoing Afghan vetting problems?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/27/fbi-money-request-signals-ongoing-problems-vetting/
GIST	<p>Tucked inside Democrats' new spending bill is \$15.3 million in emergency money for the FBI to investigate Afghan evacuees brought to the U.S. during last year's chaotic airlift.</p> <p>Congress is pumping the money into the FBI just a month after Director Christopher A. Wray told lawmakers that the bureau was having to conduct "lots of interviews" to keep track of the Afghans and obliquely warned of "a number of disruptions" of activities.</p> <p>Lawmakers said the money is the latest evidence of a hasty evacuation that jeopardizes American safety.</p> <p>"The Biden administration's decision to let tens of thousands of unvetted Afghans into our country first and ask questions later has backfired," said Rep. Thomas P. Tiffany, Wisconsin Republican. "We warned well over a year ago this would happen and two inspector general reports have since confirmed those fears, but the White House refused to listen and the horses are already out of the barn."</p> <p>The FBI didn't provide any details on how it plans to spend the money, merely repeating the White House's short explanation when it asked Congress for the money earlier this month.</p> <p>"Funding for the FBI will support ongoing Afghan refugee resettlement investigative efforts under Operation Enduring Welcome," the agency said in a statement.</p> <p>Sen. Charles E. Grassley of Iowa, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said the money was an indication that the administration failed to vet everyone properly before they were brought to the U.S.</p> <p>He said lawmakers have been told in "multiple classified briefings" about the vetting failures, but the FBI is blocking the public from learning about it by "improperly classifying it."</p> <p>"This funding request makes clear though that, contrary to the Biden administration's talking points, vetting failures continue to require the increased attention of federal law enforcement at the taxpayer expense of millions of additional dollars," the senator said in a statement to The Washington Times.</p> <p>Some 88,500 Afghans have been welcomed to the U.S. under what the government has dubbed Operation Allies Welcome. Most came during the airlift in the final weeks before the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops in August 2021, though some 4,500 have arrived since the start of March.</p> <p>The Homeland Security Department said those who made it to the U.S. went through "a rigorous, multi-layered screening and vetting process."</p> <p>Evacuees were run through databases overseas. As long as no red flags appeared, they were brought to the U.S.</p> <p>If flags were raised, evacuees faced in-person interviews.</p> <p>Once in the U.S., they cleared passport control at the airport and were sent to welcome camps to await vaccinations and resettlement assistance, though many walked off on their own, according to inspector general reports.</p> <p>Early on, all of the camps were at military bases. For most of this year, Afghan arrivals were sent to the National Conference Center in Leesburg, Virginia.</p> <p>Homeland Security announced Tuesday that the last remaining Afghans had been cleared from the center.</p>

Most have been released under Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas' power to "parole" migrants into the country.

Mr. Grassley, Mr. Tiffany and others have raised concerns about failed vetting.

Multiple inspectors general have said the administration cut corners and failed to check a key Defense Department database with information gathered from the battlefields of Afghanistan before most evacuees were brought to the U.S.

When checks were run later, dozens of potential national security risks were found to have arrived — and many had been released from the holding camps.

Mr. Wray, in testimony to the Senate last month, said he wasn't sure of the total numbers but acknowledged "there are a number of individuals through our Joint Terrorism Task Forces that we are actively trying to investigate."

He added: "I know there have been a number of interviews of individuals who came. Lots of interviews, frankly, of individuals who came as part of the evacuation. I think there have been a number of disruptions, whether — how many of those have been arrests under what charges and so forth, that I'd have to get back to on."

The FBI declined to say what Mr. Wray meant by "disruptions."

Mr. Wray said in his testimony that the "massive number of people" and the short time frame officials had to check them "inevitably raises concerns."

The Washington Times reported earlier this year on a crush of criminal cases that piled up while the Afghans were being housed at military bases around the U.S.

Among them were several that suggested culture clashes.

One involved a man accused of beating and slashing his wife after she didn't move to give up her seat to another man. Another man was convicted of groping a child. He defended his actions as part of his culture.

A third man was found guilty by a jury in Alexandria, Virginia, last month on charges of abusive sexual contact, enticement of a minor and possession of child pornography.

At one of the bases, in New Mexico, state police said they responded to dozens of call-outs concerning the Afghans.

Federal investigators said the actual level of criminality may have been even higher than reported. Afghan leaders discouraged reporting, seeking to settle matters internally. Military officials were also unsure whether to get prosecutors involved, fearing it would undermine the welcoming mission that the Biden administration had assigned them.

Once off the bases, some Afghans racked up criminal entanglements.

Zabihullah Mohmand entered an Alford plea this summer to a charge of misdemeanor sexual assault of a college student. He had been charged with rape but accepted the plea: He did not admit guilt but did acknowledge that prosecutors would win a conviction against him.

He was sentenced to time served and released.

The spending bill that includes the FBI money is considered must-pass legislation. It continues government functions into the next fiscal year, which starts Saturday. Without the legislation, the government would face a shutdown.

	<p>The bill includes nearly \$1.8 billion for the Health and Human Services Department to process and house the ongoing surge of illegal immigrant children at the border. It also includes language granting Afghan evacuees access to benefits that are normally reserved for refugees.</p> <p>Mr. Biden failed in most of his other immigration requests, including an attempt to pump money into federal efforts to welcome and move migrants from border states deeper into the country.</p> <p>Congress also didn't grant Mr. Biden's request to create a special pathway to citizenship for Afghan evacuees.</p> <p>Mr. Tiffany said the bill should have included reforms to rein in Mr. Mayorkas' parole powers.</p>
Return to Top	

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/28 Report: half of world bird species in decline
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/28/nearly-half-worlds-bird-species-in-decline-as-destruction-of-avian-life-intensifies-aoe
GIST	<p>Nearly half of the planet's bird species are in decline, according to a definitive report that paints the grimmest picture yet of the destruction of avian life.</p> <p>The State of the World's Birds report, which is released every four years by BirdLife International, shows that the expansion and intensification of agriculture is putting pressure on 73% of species. Logging, invasive species, exploitation of natural resources and climate breakdown are the other main threats.</p> <p>Globally, 49% of bird species are declining, one in eight are threatened with extinction and at least 187 species are confirmed or suspected to have gone extinct since 1500. Most of these have been endemic species living on islands, although there is an increase in birds now going extinct on larger land masses, particularly in tropical regions. In Ethiopia, for example, the conversion of grassland to farmland has caused an 80% decrease in endemic Liben larks since 2007. Just 6% of bird species globally are increasing.</p> <p>Since 1970, 2.9 billion individual birds (29% of the total) have been destroyed in North America. The picture is just as bleak in other parts of the world – since 1980, 600 million birds (19%) have been destroyed in Europe, with previously abundant species such as the common swift, common snipe and rook among those slipping towards extinction. Europe's farmland birds have shown the most significant declines: 57% have disappeared as a result of increased mechanisation, use of chemicals and converting land into crops. In Australia, 43% of abundant seabird species have declined between 2000 and 2016.</p> <p>Dr Stuart Butchart, chief scientist at BirdLife International, said: “We have to stop these declines and start getting on track for recovery. Our future, as well as the world's birds, depends on it. If we continue to unravel the fabric of life, we're going to continue to place our own future at threat.”</p> <p>The report is made up of a compendium of other studies, and because birds are the best-studied group on the planet, it gives an idea of the state of nature more generally. “Birds are useful for telling us about the state of the planet. What they say is that nature is in poor condition, lots of species are in decline,” said Butchart.</p> <p>Birds are cornerstones of healthy ecosystems, so their disappearance is likely to have myriad negative knock-on effects. Hornbills, for example, disperse large seeds in tropical forests; turkey vultures dispose of organic waste, while seabirds help in the cycle of nutrients between sea and land, keeping coral reefs healthy.</p>

The previous [State of the World's Birds report](#), released in 2018, found 40% of bird species worldwide in decline.

Wildfires feature more prominently in this report than previous editions, having increased and ravaged [previously unaffected habitats](#). The succession of heatwaves, droughts and floods in recent years will lead to widespread species extinctions if they continue, researchers warn, highlighting the importance of addressing the nature and climate crises at the same time.

Growing evidence links the health of bird populations to human health. Covid-19 is a warning of what could happen if we continue to destroy the natural world, with 70% of zoonotic diseases originating in wildlife. A highly pathogenic variant of avian flu – the result of intensive farming – has [driven rapid declines in some bird populations](#) this year. More than 300 outbreaks have been reported in UK seabird colonies.

The report comes ahead of the [Cop15 meeting](#) in Montreal in December, a once-in-a-decade opportunity to create new legislation to tackle the biodiversity crisis. Butchart hopes the findings will feed into the final statement from Montreal. “The key action needed now by governments is to make sure a really ambitious and bold global biodiversity framework is adopted. We’ve got to bend this curve, so by 2030 we’re on a mission of being nature positive,” he said.

This means increasing the number and quality of protected areas, conserving remaining habitats and restoring those that have been degraded. Preventing the illegal killing of birds, managing invasive species, reducing fisheries’ bycatch and preventing overexploitation of natural resources will all help.

The report is not all gloom. According to BirdLife, between 21 and 32 bird species would have gone extinct since 1993 without conservation work. It cites the [creation of a new seabird haven](#) the size of France in the North Atlantic, estimated to protect 5 million birds.

Juliet Vickery, chief executive of the British Trust for Ornithology, who was not involved in compiling the report, said: “The fact that nearly half of all bird species are declining and one in eight is at risk of extinction reinforces the fact that we are living through a biodiversity crisis. It requires action at every level, from local to global. This carries a strong warning about the health of our natural world.”

Birds in trouble

- The South American **harpy eagle**, which stands 1 metre (3 feet) tall and feeds on monkeys and sloths, is one of the world’s largest birds of prey. It was uplisted from near threatened to vulnerable on the International Union for [Conservation](#) of Nature (IUCN) red list in 2021 because of a combination of forest loss, hunting, poaching and collisions with power lines. It has declined by 50% in 60 years.
- The **secretary bird**, a raptor from sub-Saharan Africa, went from being vulnerable to endangered in 2020 after habitat degradation driven by the burning of grasslands and intensive livestock grazing. Birds are also captured for the wildlife trade.
- The **lesser florican**, a species endemic to the Indian subcontinent whose males perform leaping rituals to get the attention of females, has declined by 90% in 20 years, mainly because of the loss of grassland habitats and the predation of its chicks by feral dogs. There are believed to be fewer than 1,000 mature individuals left, and it is now critically endangered.
- The impressive vocal abilities of the Central American **yellow-naped Amazon** has made it one of the most sought-after parrots in the pet trade. It has declined by more than 80% in 30 years, mainly due to poaching and the expansion of agriculture, and as of 2022 is critically endangered.
- The **Bahama warbler** was badly affected by Hurricane Dorian in 2019, especially on Grand Bahama, where 95% of its habitat is believed to have been destroyed. It was listed as endangered in 2020.

HEADLINE	09/27 Survey: 37% adults strong feelings Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/nearly-40-of-u-s-adults-have-strong-feelings-about-seattle/
GIST	<p>Is Seattle considered a desirable place to live? With our beautiful natural scenery, outdoorsy lifestyle and temperate climate, I've always thought so. But these days, not everyone seems to conjure up such positive associations with the city.</p> <p>In fact, a new national survey suggests Seattle may have become one of the most highly polarizing cities. People either love it or hate it.</p> <p>The survey of 1,000 U.S. adults was commissioned by Clever, an online real estate education platform. Market research provider Pollfish conducted the survey online in August, asking respondents about the reasons they live where they do and where they would most and least like to live.</p> <p>One part of the survey asked respondents to pick the five most and least desirable cities from a list of the country's 50 largest. Impressively, around 21% of respondents chose Seattle as one of the five best places to live — the second-highest percentage among the 50 cities.</p> <p>That's the good news. The bad news is around 16% of respondents included Seattle in their list of the five worst places to live, the seventh-highest percentage among the cities.</p> <p>Add those two numbers up and you get a total of 37% of Americans who think Seattle is either one of the best big cities in the country or one of the worst.</p> <p>Seattle was one of just three cities to make the Top 10 for both most and least desirable. But, hey, at least a higher percentage of folks put Seattle among the best than among the worst.</p> <p>That wasn't true of the other two most-polarizing cities. San Francisco, which also made the Top 10 for best and worst, was ranked among the most desirable by 19% of respondents, a little lower than the 21% who thought of it as one of the least desirable. And Los Angeles, the other city to land in both top 10s, fared even worse: It was the No. 1 least desirable city in the survey, selected by 27% of respondents, while 19% included it on their most desirable list.</p> <p>The survey didn't ask respondents their reasons for liking or disliking these cities. But it seems likely to me that a lot of those strong reactions have to do with "culture war" issues. Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles are all cities well-known for their highly-progressive policies, which is very appealing to some folks and a turnoff to others.</p> <p>The city that ranked No. 1 as the most desirable is a very different kind of place: Virginia Beach, Virginia, chosen by slightly more than 21% of respondents. "It's not very polarizing," said Jaime Dunaway-Seale, data writer at Clever, "Nobody hates Virginia Beach." She also thinks beach towns have a built-in appeal for many people — and Virginia Beach is also one of the more affordable big cities.</p> <p>Seattle's biggest fans were millennials, who ranked the Emerald City as the No. 1 most desirable city, according to Dunaway-Seale (24% of millennials placed it on their list of the most desirable). That didn't surprise me at all. In the 2010s, Seattle was an "it" city for young millennials, who flocked here in such numbers that we became the fastest-growing big U.S. city.</p> <p>But there wasn't a clear distinction in Seattle's appeal along generational lines. Seattle ranked highly on both most and least desirable lists for both younger and older adults. And in fact, baby boomers ranked Seattle higher than Gen Z.</p> <p>"Compared with millennials, Gen Z was really drawn to the big, big cities like L.A. and New York," Dunaway-Seale said. Los Angeles was the most desirable city for Gen Z, while Seattle ranked ninth.</p>

Half of the 10 cities that ranked among the most desirable are some of the most expensive places to live in the U.S. — Seattle, San Diego, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver. It’s no surprise then that among those surveyed who said they were dissatisfied with their current location, more than half (52%) felt they can’t afford to move to a more desirable area.

The survey also asked respondents about the most and least desirable states in which to live. Like Seattle, Washington wound up in the Top 10 on both rankings, along with four other states. Washington ranked 8th on both the most and least desirable lists, selected by 18% on both.

The four other most polarizing states were Florida, California, Texas and New York.

[Return to Top](#)

U.S. adults love and hate Seattle

A new survey of 1,000 U.S. adults found that Seattle ranks in the top 10 both for the most and least desirable cities in which to live.

MOST DESIRABLE TO LIVE IN %

1.	Virginia Beach	21.4%
2.	Seattle	20.8%
3.	San Diego	19.3%
4.	Los Angeles	19.0%
5.	San Francisco	18.6%
6.	Phoenix	17.3%
7.	Denver	17.1%
8.	Miami	16.4%
9.	Nashville	16.0%
10.	Tampa	15.9%



LEAST DESIRABLE TO LIVE IN %

1.	Los Angeles	27.3%
2.	Birmingham	21.3%
3.	San Francisco	21.1%
4.	Detroit	18.9%
5.	New York	17.8%
6.	Chicago	17.0%
7.	Seattle	16.3%
8.	Dallas	15.9%
9.	Milwaukee	15.9%
10.	Washington, D.C.	15.0%



Source: Clever Real Estate

Reporting by GENE BALK, graphic by MARK NOWLIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

HEADLINE	09/28 'Disastrous' 2022 melt of Swiss glaciers
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/study-heatwave-led-unprecedented-melt-swiss-glaciers-90623748
GIST	GENEVA -- Switzerland's glaciers are melting like never before, an academic study released Wednesday shows, with their ice volume declining by 6 percent in a “disastrous” 2022 amid rising concerns about global warming and a summer heat wave that swept across Europe.

The Swiss Academy of Sciences reports that the shrinkage of ice in glaciers in Switzerland — which has the greatest volume of glaciers of any country in Europe — has topped a previous record retreat nearly a generation ago.

“2022 was a disastrous year for Swiss glaciers: all ice melt records were smashed by the great dearth of snow in winter and continuous heat waves in summer,” the academy said in a statement, basing its report on data collected by Glamos, the Swiss glacier monitoring network.

The report chronicles in detail the damage across the Swiss Alps: Over six meters of ice melted this year on the Konkordiaplatz summit in the Great Aletsch Glacier in the south, near the Italian border. Small glaciers like Pizol in the east near Liechtenstein, Vadret dal Corvatsch near St. Moritz in the southeast, and Schwarzbachfirn in central Switzerland have “practically disappeared,” the team said.

The country faced what might be considered a “perfect storm” this year that led to the big melt. Snow cover in the Swiss Alps was exceptionally light this year — particularly in the southeast — meaning that the glaciers had less natural protection from the heat. Plus, a dust drift from the Sahara that blanketed many parts of Europe in the spring contaminated the snow, causing it to absorb more solar heat.

Then, a spike in summer heat swept across Europe — intensifying the pressure.

Switzerland is not alone: The Bavarian Academy of Sciences in Germany said the ice sheet on the Southern Schneeferner in the Alps had melted so much this summer that it could no longer be considered a glacier — leaving Germany now with only four glaciers.

The findings come on top of another study released last month showing that Switzerland’s 1,400 glaciers have lost more than half their total volume since the early 1930s.

[Return to Top](#)

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Ex-Army reservist guilty: China agent
SOURCE	https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2022/09/27/ex-army-reservist-convicted-of-illegally-acting-as-chinese-agent/
GIST	<p>Four years after he was arrested on suspicion of spying, a former U.S. Army reservist has been convicted by a federal jury for acting as an illegal agent on behalf of the People’s Republic of China.</p> <p>Ji Chaoqun, 31, was found guilty at the conclusion of a two-week trial that followed a joint investigation by the FBI and the Army’s 902nd Military Intelligence Group, the Justice Department announced Tuesday.</p> <p>Once a graduate student in Chicago, Ji enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves in 2016 under the parameters of the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program, which extends enlistment opportunities to select legal aliens who possess skills pertinent to national security. Ji reportedly stated he had no affiliation with any foreign government during the enlistment process and in at least one subsequent discussion with a U.S. service member.</p> <p>While serving the Army, Ji acted as an agent reporting directly to high-ranking intelligence officers in China’s Ministry of State Security, according to evidence presented in the case and a criminal complaint.</p> <p>Ji was tasked with providing his superiors with biographical information on prospective recruits who could be of value to China’s Jiangsu Province Ministry of State Security, a regional foreign intelligence arm of the national intelligence apparatus headquartered in Nanjing, China.</p>

	<p>“The individuals included Chinese nationals who were working as engineers and scientists in the United States, some of whom were U.S. defense contractors,” the release said. “This tasking was part of an effort by the Jiangsu provincial department to obtain access to advanced aerospace and satellite technologies being developed by companies within the U.S.”</p> <p>Ji’s immediate superior, meanwhile, was Xu Yanjun, a deputy division director with China’s Ministry of State Security who was convicted in Ohio last year on charges of conspiracy and attempting to commit economic espionage and theft of trade secrets.</p> <p>After deliberations, the federal jury found Ji guilty on one count of conspiracy to act as an agent of a foreign government without notifying the attorney general, one count as acting as an agent of the People’s Republic of China without first notifying the attorney general, and one count of making a material false statement to the Army. He was acquitted on two counts of wire fraud, the Justice Department release said.</p> <p>Charges of acting as an illegal agent carry a maximum prison sentence of 10 years. Conspiracy and false statement offenses are punishable by a sentence of up to five years.</p> <p>A sentencing date has not yet been set.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	09/28 DEA: fake pills w/fentanyl drive OD deaths
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/dea-fake-pills-containing-fentanyl-helping-drive-od-deaths/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — An increasing number of fake prescription pills that contain potentially deadly fentanyl are helping drive overdose death rates to record levels in the U.S., including some now manufactured in rainbow colors designed to look like candy, federal officials said Tuesday.</p> <p>Drug Enforcement Administration agents are working to crack down on violent drug cartels in Mexico believed to be trafficking the drugs into the U.S., Attorney General Merrick Garland said. Between May and September, the DEA and local police around the country seized more than 10 million fentanyl pills and hundreds of pounds of powder, he said.</p> <p>Vastly powerful synthetic drugs like fentanyl are behind record overdose deaths in the U.S. Law enforcement officials nationwide have been struggling to combat the surge of drugs in urban and rural communities. The global coronavirus pandemic has overshadowed the American opioid epidemic, but when overdose deaths surpassed 100,000 during the 12-month period ending in April 2021, it rocketed back into the public consciousness.</p> <p>“I read too many reports on too many cases, including too many young people who ended up dying after taking just one pill laced with fentanyl, often disguised as something else,” Garland said.</p> <p>First reported in February, the rainbow pills have been seized in 21 states now, DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said. While fentanyl is still more commonly disguised as oxycodone or another prescription drug, the rainbow pills are on the increase.</p> <p>“We believe it is being marketed and aimed at young people,” Milgram said.</p> <p>Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., also sounded the alarm this weekend about the rise of the drug in New York City and Long Island as he pushed for new funding to fight its spread.</p> <p>Two Mexican drug cartels are responsible for the majority of fentanyl in the U.S., federal authorities said. The Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel buy precursor chemicals from China, then traffic them into the U.S., where they are sometimes sold on social media platforms.</p> <p>Over the last four months, authorities have investigated nearly 400 cases, 51 of them linked to overdoses and 35 tied directly to the two cartels. In addition to being pressed into fake pills, fentanyl powder is also moved into other drugs like cocaine and heroin, Milgram said.</p>

	<p>“Our top operational priority has been and will continue to be to defeat these two cartels,” she said.</p> <p>Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that can be 50 times more potent than heroin, and even a tiny amount can be lethal. Fake prescription pills are especially dangerous because it’s difficult to tell how strong they are.</p> <p>About two-thirds of overdose deaths in the U.S. have been linked to fentanyl or other powerful, illicitly made synthetic opioids.</p> <p>Jonathan Caulkins, a professor of operations research and public policy at Carnegie Mellon University, said containing synthetics with law enforcement is a challenge because the drug can be made in labs anywhere rather than grown in fields like cocaine or heroin — and because it is so potent and is trafficked in smaller amounts.</p> <p>“How the heck is law enforcement supposed to find a few metric tons in an economy that trades megatons of raw materials?” Caulkins asked.</p> <p>Caulkins said the best ways to deal with the fentanyl crisis is to put money toward treatment and increasing the availability of naloxone, a drug that reverses overdoses — but added that using arrests to reduce the supply may be worth trying.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Judge sentences Capitol rioter to 7yrs
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/capitol-rioter-a-one-man-wrecking-ball-gets-7-year-term/
GIST	<p>DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A judge sentenced a Capitol rioter to seven years in prison Tuesday, calling the Iowa man a “one man wrecking ball” who helped in a sustained assault on a police officer.</p> <p>Judge Amy Berman Jackson sentenced Kyle Young in U.S. District Court in Washington to the long term, noting he had admitted to helping in the assault of a police officer during the Jan. 6, 2021, riot. She gave him credit for the 17 months he’s been held since his arrest, meaning he likely will serve nearly six years in prison.</p> <p>“You were a one man wrecking ball that day,” Berman Jackson told Young.</p> <p>The sentences is among the longest handed down so far in the riot, which halted the certification of President Joe Biden’s electoral victory and sent lawmakers running for their lives. The harshest sentence of 10 years behind bars was given to a former New York City police officer who assaulted an officer at the Capitol with a metal flagpole. About 900 people have been charged so far in the Capitol attack and more than 400 have pleaded guilty or been convicted at trial.</p> <p>Young cried as he apologized to former D.C. Metropolitan Police Officer Michael Fanone and said he wished he could take back his actions of that day.</p> <p>“I hope someday you forgive me,” he said.</p> <p>Fanone told the court of the near-death experience he endured at the hands of the rioters in which he was beaten and repeatedly shocked with a stun gun. Young admitted to handing a stun gun to another rioter who used it on Fanone, and of grabbing the officer’s hand as he struggled to protect himself from the attacking mob.</p> <p>Fanone said the attack ended his career as an officer.</p> <p>He told Jackson that Young should get 10 years in prison.</p> <p>“What I hope you do with that time is, I hope you suffer,” Fanone told Young during his own emotional recount of the day’s events.</p>

Fanone embraced a fellow officer outside the courthouse after the sentencing. He did not speak with media when asked for his reaction the sentence.

Fanone was among the officers who testified before the U.S. House Committee that's investigating the insurrection about the violence they experienced that day. Fanone told House investigators that he was "grabbed, beaten, tased, all while being called a traitor to my country." That assault on him, which stopped only when he said he had children, caused him to have a heart attack.

Young, 38, of Redfield, Iowa, originally faced more than a dozen charges but entered a plea to the single charge of assault of an officer.

He went to the Capitol with his 16-year-old son and video played by federal prosecutors indicated Young took part during fighting on the Capitol's lower west terrace, including at one point throwing a heavy speaker that hit another rioter, drawing blood. He used a strobe light to blind fighting officers and at one point gave it to his son, allowing him to directly participate in the fighting, a point the judge used to illustrate her disgust at his actions that day.

Young's attorney Samuel Moore argued his engagement with the officer was two to three seconds of holding Fanone's wrist. He tried to convince the judge that the government's request of seven years was excessive and "outside his specific criminal conduct.

Young also will serve three years under supervision once released. A hearing will be held later to determine his restitution. He also was ordered to complete 100 hours of community service.

"You are one of the most serious Jan. 6 offenders in my caseload and you were personally involved in and instrumental to one of the most horrific attacks on officers incased in this building," the judge told Young. "I have seldom in my years on the bench been presented with anything like this."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Clues, stories Ukraine mass graves tell
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/digital-clues-and-the-stories-ukraines-mass-graves-have-to-tell/
GIST	<p>Mass graves offend something deep in the human conscience because they fly in the face of our instinct to honor the dead. Years ago, I wrote a book about a war crimes trial in Rwanda and I always assumed mass graves were the work of perpetrators – a ham-handed effort to cover up unspeakable crimes.</p> <p>But in Ukraine, that's only half the story.</p> <p>"In Bucha we have different kinds of mass graves," says Mykhaliya Skoryk-Shkarivska, the city's deputy mayor.</p> <p>The first is the kind that Ukrainians actually stumble upon, unexpectedly, in the forest or on the outskirts of town. "These are the mass graves where Russians executed people, digged the holes in the graves to hide them," she says.</p> <p>And then there is a second kind of mass grave; the kind that appeared in many of the Russian-occupied cities in Ukraine – these mass graves were dug by local people to prevent disease, or to stop stray dogs from desecrating the bodies. In Bucha, the largest is near the Church of St. Andrew, in the center of town. Municipal workers and hospital employees dug it when they were still under occupation this past spring.</p> <p>"Russians allow them to do a temporary cemetery, so they dug a big trench and put like, they are saying... about 67 bodies inside," says Skoryk-Shkarivska, who advised the mayor on digital innovation before the war.</p>

Eventually there would be hundreds of bodies in the temporary cemetery at St. Andrew. “You have to bury people even without the documentation. And when you do it without the documents, you have to dig them out” so people can identify them, she says. But there was no one to connect a name to a face with a body.

To keep track of hundreds of DNA samples, establish cause of death, and gather evidence of possible war crimes someone has to organize millions of little digital clues. It fell to Skoryk-Shkarivska, in charge of all things digital for Bucha, to build a system to modernize something she’d never expected to modernize: a way to account for the dead.

“Our system was not able to manage such a big amount of requests looking for the bodies or looking for the disappeared people and of course to recognize the corpses,” she says. “Nobody in Bucha expected it to become a place of tragedy.”

Creating a system to account for the dead

Before the war, Skoryk-Shkarivska’s (“My foreign friends call me Mika—it is easier, no?” she says) digital innovation involved getting city data on computers and automating tax collection. City workers provided permits for single funerals on the cemetery grounds.

Life as she knew it changed on a Thursday, announced by black smoke. Her first glimpse of what was to come was out near the airport. She was driving to get some gas in her car when she saw Russian aircraft flying low and she turned to see that the Ukrainian helicopters parked on the tarmac were already on fire. “I heard heavy battles, very close,” she says.

That was the starting gun. The world watched as things got worse from there. Russian troops entered Bucha on March 3, 2022 and they left 32-days later, leaving death and destruction in their wake.

Mika had fled from Bucha hours after she’d seen the helicopters ablaze. She had been an activist and a journalist and was sure she would be included on a Russian hit-list. She gathered her son and didn’t wait to find out.

When Mika returned to Bucha in mid-April, the city’s satellite communications and electricity were back on and she had already mapped out what she would do next. “We asked our colleagues to provide us some smartphones and one iPad,” and she began collecting data on the dead. “We had lots of imprisoned people. We had lots of killed people,” she says.

Bucha had police databases, missing persons reports, photographs of the disappeared on Telegram channels, but the problem was all these little clues were siloed. There was no central repository, no single database to search. Mika came to find out that even Ukraine’s morgues were mostly pen-and-paper operations.

Digitizing records was something Bucha’s city officials had always intended to do – but never got around to.

Mika decided it was time to change all that. “We received data from five morgues around Bucha and we created a primary database,” she explains. The database ingested everything the morgues knew about the more than 400 bodies they had examined but didn’t have room to keep.

They had catalogued not just sex, approximate age, and hair color but a collection of details that might help families find their loved ones. Things like tattoos, birthmarks, and scars. Mika created a second database that cataloged who went into which mass grave and where. Then she cross-referenced the information so when families arrived with details about their missing relatives she knew exactly where to look.

Her system allowed the families not just to honor the dead but to hold real funerals and proper burials for the people of Bucha. Knowing precisely what happened to each of them – before they were put in the mass graves – will take some time. “I think that in one year, in two years, maybe three years time, we will have

not only the names and the data from the morgue, but also the results of the investigations,” she says, adding that it will be a painstaking forensic endeavor that will unfold in slow, incremental steps.

The database helps anchor things, offering not just a semblance of order but closure, too. “We are still helping families to recognize their killed relatives,” she says.

As forensic pathologists, ballistics experts, and international authorities descend on the city of Bucha, Mika has given them a place to start.

‘War crimes are about organizations’

[Ambassador Stephen Rapp](#) was the chief prosecutor of a Rwandan war crimes trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. I met him more than 20 years ago while I was writing a book about the trial of the journalists behind the radio station, RTLM, that helped foment the genocide.

In the intervening years he’s been involved in war crimes prosecutions in [Sierra Leone](#) and [Syria](#) and then became an Ambassador-at-Large focused on war crimes at the State Department. So he is intimately familiar with what it takes to build these kinds of cases, and he’s advising the Ukrainian government on how it might build cases against Russian soldiers who committed atrocities during the war.

“Building a war crimes case is quite different from building a normal violent crime case,” Rapp says. “Most violent crimes involve some planning, but they are over and done with in a few minutes. You can control the crime scene and you can take advantage of video cameras.”

In Bucha, crimes were committed all over the city for 32 days. And, while there will be social media posts, CCTV footage, and witnesses’ secret iPhone videos to help build these cases, finding all that digital evidence — in a city of 30,000 in the midst of war — only scratches the surface of why trials for war crimes continue to be so complicated.

The physical evidence tells just part of the story.

“You have mass graves, bodies left on the street for three or four weeks with hands tied behind their back with bullets in the back of heads,” Rapp says. “Those are situations in which there are war crimes without question. But then there’s the issue of who committed those crimes? Who’s really responsible? Were they rogue units? Scared young soldiers who just acted out of their own impulses? Or was that part of a strategy in which the military command really looked to intimidate the population? That’s what we have to prove.”

Before 2014, answering those kinds of questions was nearly impossible. Then two things happened. Mass surveillance moved from something that was largely in the purview of governments to becoming open source.

And no collective of citizen investigative journalists leveraged that better than an organization called [Bellingcat](#). It was behind a number of remarkable investigations, but the one that put it on the map was the downing of [Malaysia Airlines flight MH17](#), which disappeared from the radar over Ukrainian airspace in 2014. All 298 people aboard were killed.

Bellingcat began looking through social media posts around eastern Ukraine, the area where the airplane went down. They managed to uncover the actual video of the Russian surface-to-air missile launcher not just coming into Ukraine shortly before the crash, but actually heading back to Russia the very next day carrying just three missiles instead of four.

Dutch investigators were then able to find intercepted calls from that same period, and what they heard was confusion after rebels realized they may have just downed a commercial plane and their arguments over how to whisk the missile launcher back to Russia. In the end, four men — three Russians and a Ukrainian — were charged for the murder of all 298 people in absentia.

The story, unfortunately, doesn't have a completely satisfying ending: eight years later, there's still no verdict in the case. But Rapp says it is a good illustration of just how much digital information can help prosecutors make a seemingly impossible case stick. And, he adds, that was back in 2014. There is a lot more digital dust now, which could help when it comes time to prove who is responsible for crimes like the ones in Bucha.

"It's people up the chain," he says.

People like Russian President Vladimir Putin. People who ordered the bombardment of civilian targets in Ukraine. People who told soldiers to show "no mercy" to the residents of occupied cities.

"Of course, it's not an easy way to prove this system of command responsibility from the highest level," [Andriy Kostin](#), the prosecutor general of Ukraine told CBS' Face the Nation recently. "We know who is responsible for it. Because the crime of aggression is the mother of all of these crimes: of war crimes, genocide, because without aggression, there will be no other war crimes. And for that reason, for the crime of aggression, the highest political and military leadership should be prosecuted and should be punished."

Ambassador Rapp, who is part of a group strategizing how those trials might be organized, says it is a little more complicated than that. He says prosecutions need to be structured and systematic to bring speedier justice. In Rwanda, among others, there was the trial over the media, and a case focused on genocide and rape in the university town of Butare.

"They could be working with police in particular on a strategic approach or perhaps moving in the direction of having a special court or a special division within the national court and within the national prosecutor service to deal with more mid-level offenders," he said.

Actually trying to prosecute Putin would be more complicated, he says, though Rapp made clear that Putin isn't doing himself any favors by not having court martials or investigations when news of fresh atrocities surface.

["Putin giving awards to at least one of the major units involved \[in Bucha\] as heroes and defenders of the fatherland](#), that you could impute responsibility all the way up to him, potentially," he said.

Which is what Mika wants. She wants Putin and everyone who might have been responsible for what happened in Bucha to be held to account.

In the meantime, it is hard to shake the feeling that Bucha is prelude. Mika says while she's worried about what Putin might do next, her life in Bucha has to go on. So she's making those accommodations you have to make when you're at war. She carries her smartphone everywhere now because Bucha has instituted a new missile warning system – it sounds like one of those Amber Alerts but in this case it warns of rocket attack.

She says the war has changed everyone. "My little son, he's seven years old. He's all the time talking about killing Putin and about Russians as enemies," she says. And while he is back at school sometimes his class is held in the basement when the smartphone alerts ring. "It's hard to be in a position that every minute you have to stop what you are doing and hide from the air attack."

She says he builds pillow forts to protect them both now and has taken to singing Ukrainian patriotic songs.

Sometimes they sing them together.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Libraries across US receive violent threats
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/v7vyvb/libraries-across-the-us-are-receiving-violent-threats

GIST

In the last two weeks, at least a dozen public libraries across the U.S. received threats that resulted in canceled events and systemwide closures. While bomb and active shooter threats to public library systems in Nashville, Fort Worth, Denver, Salt Lake City, Boston, and other cities across the country were ultimately deemed hoaxes, library workers and patrons say they're still reeling in the aftermath.

Some of the recent threats have been directed at LGBTQ events hosted at libraries across the country. A library in a Chicago suburb [canceled its drag bingo night after receiving threats](#) earlier this month. And last week, a teen drag star was forced to cancel a book reading at a library in the Bronx after a [series of homophobic threats](#).

Other threats seemed to have no obvious motive but come at a time when libraries and [library workers](#) have increasingly [become targets of harassment](#). Public libraries were also [closed statewide in Hawaii](#) over the weekend due to an "unspecified threat."

Library workers close to the events at the Denver Public Library (DPL), Nashville Public Library, and Boston Public Library confirmed that the threats were received via digital reference points that allow patrons to communicate with library workers. These services are run on software platforms powered by Springshare, and thousands of library workers use Springshare's tools to communicate with patrons through direct chat, email, or SMS functions.

According to several Denver Public Library employees who asked not to be identified due to their proximity to the situation, there were inconsistencies in communicating about the situation to on-site workers. Meanwhile, sources say there was about an hour when the remote employees managing DPL's online services were encouraged to remain online. Eventually, all employees were offered a paid day off.

"[Leadership] didn't seem to have a protocol in place for receiving this kind of threat," one DPL employee told Motherboard. The source found this lack of preparation "disappointing" considering how commonplace threats have become in the US over the years to many public institutions, including schools and hospitals.

"I don't think [DPL's] preparation or response to safety issues and trauma in the workplace is great overall," the source added.

The lack of trust librarians have in their institutions to protect them from threats isn't unique to DPL. [A recent study](#) from the New York Library Association, Urban Librarians Unite, and St. John's University explored how public library workers in urban centers experience trauma while providing library services.

The findings reflect frontline work during the pandemic and the increased need for librarians to wear multiple hats, including some social work responsibilities. While the study does not specifically address bomb or active shooter threats, the study does demonstrate that institutions have traditionally prioritized service to communities in need over the well-being of staff to the detriment of the affected staff.

Alison Macrina, executive director of the Library Freedom Project, told Motherboard that librarians have lost trust in their administrations' ability to keep them safe during a volatile moment.

"It's been a larger pattern through all these right-wing attacks," Macrina told Motherboard. "Admin just like, not taking any of it seriously enough, not getting it. So their responses to these bomb threats are seen as more of the same. And also admins just not communicating through these situations [makes] the workers feel even more isolated and at risk."

Shirley Robinson, executive director of the Texas Library Association, told Motherboard that library administrators are treading a thin line. They are responsible for serving the public by ensuring that their libraries are able to remain open and support collection guidelines and reconsideration policies. They also work with the people electing city council leaders and school board leaders to better understand the censorship issues, in addition to retaining library workers.

	<p>“It is an incredibly difficult position [for leadership],” Robinson told Motherboard. “And then for the library workers you are on the front lines, you are interacting with members of the public who may come in and just be really upset that a certain book is on the shelf. To be in that frontline position and explain to an angry patron that yeah, this book may not be here for your child, but it’s definitely here for another child or another member of the public, and you have a right to choose what you’re checking out or not.”</p> <p>Macrina said that library workers are willing to give leadership room to figure out how to operate in these times.</p> <p>“But at this point, it’s clear in a lot of places that there is just total denial of reality,” Macrina said.</p> <p>While the motivations behind some of the hoax threats to public libraries are unspecified, many are coming from out-of-state in each case, suggesting the threats are a coordinated effort to interrupt public library events. The threats also come on the heels of a recent report which tied efforts to ban books to far-right, anti-LGBTQ advocacy organizations. According to the American Library Association, a record number of books have been challenged or removed from library shelves in the past year.</p> <p>While the level of coordination is unclear at the time of reporting, library workers are now trying to figure out what it means to accept hoax threats as a normal part of their jobs.</p> <p>“There’s just no easy answer for any of it right now other than to vote in November,” said Robinson.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Guilty pleas: submarine secrets sale case
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/sep/27/maryland-couple-plead-guilty-in-submarine-secrets/
GIST	<p>CHARLESTON, W.Va. — A U.S. Navy nuclear engineer and his wife entered new guilty pleas Tuesday in a case involving an alleged plot to sell secrets about nuclear-powered warships, a month after their previous plea agreements that had called for specific sentencing guidelines were rejected.</p> <p>Jonathan and Diana Toebe of Annapolis, Maryland, pleaded guilty in federal court in Martinsburg, West Virginia, to one felony count each of conspiracy to communicate restricted data.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Gina Groh last month rejected the couple’s initial pleas to the same charges, saying the sentencing options were “strikingly deficient” considering the seriousness of the case. The couple then immediately withdrew their initial guilty pleas and Groh set trial for January.</p> <p>The previous sentencing range agreed to by lawyers for Jonathan Toebe had called for a potential punishment between roughly 12 years and 17 years in prison. Prosecutors said Tuesday that such a sentence would be one of the most significant imposed in modern times under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954. Prosecutors also sought three years for Diana Toebe.</p> <p>Under the latest plea agreement entered Tuesday before U.S. Magistrate Judge Robert Trumble, the couple would each face a maximum sentence of life in prison and a \$100,000 fine, although prosecutors are asking for a sentence for Diana Toebe at the lowest end of the guideline range.</p> <p>If the court doesn’t accept the latest agreement, the defendants would again have the right to withdraw their guilty pleas.</p> <p>Prosecutors said Jonathan Toebe, 43, abused his access to top-secret government information and repeatedly sold details about the design elements and performance characteristics of Virginia-class submarines to someone he believed was a representative of a foreign government but who was actually an undercover FBI agent.</p> <p>Diana Toebe, 46, who was teaching at a private school in Maryland at the time of the couple’s arrest last October, was accused of acting as a lookout at several prearranged “dead-drop” locations at which memory cards containing the secret information were left behind.</p>

The memory cards were devices concealed in objects such as a chewing gum wrapper and a peanut butter sandwich. The couple was arrested after he placed a memory card at a dead drop location in Jefferson County, West Virginia.

None of the information was classified as top secret or secret, falling into a third category considered confidential, according to previous testimony.

The FBI has said the scheme began in April 2020, when Jonathan Toebbe sent a package of Navy documents to a foreign government and wrote that he was interested in selling to that country operations manuals, performance reports and other sensitive information. He included in the package, which had a Pittsburgh return address, instructions to his supposed contact for how to establish a covert relationship with him, prosecutors said.

That package was obtained by the FBI in December 2020 through its legal attaché office in the unspecified foreign country. That set off a monthslong undercover operation in which an agent posing as a representative of a foreign country made contact with Toebbe, ultimately paying \$100,000 in cryptocurrency in exchange for the information Toebbe was offering.

The country to which he was looking to sell the information has not been identified in court documents and was not disclosed in court.

Prosecutors said the government has recovered classified information that Jonathan Toebbe had saved on electronic devices along with a “substantial amount” of the cryptocurrency.

During a search of the couple’s home, FBI agents found a trash bag of shredded documents, thousands of dollars in cash, valid children’s passports and a “go-bag” containing a USB flash drive and latex gloves, according to court testimony last year.

Diana Toebbe’s lawyers at a December 2021 hearing denied prosecution assertions that cited 2019 messages exchanged by the couple in which she had contemplated fleeing the United States to avoid arrest. Instead, the defense said it was contempt for then-President Donald Trump as the reason behind the couple’s emigration plans.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Grays Harbor Co. fire station \$90K burglary
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/90000-of-lifesaving-equipment-stolen-from-grays-harbor-county-fire-station
GIST	<p>GRAYS HARBOR COUNTY, Wash. - Authorities say \$90,000 in firefighting and lifesaving equipment was stolen from a Grays Harbor County fire station.</p> <p>According to the Grays Harbor Fire District #1, a team member discovered the station had been burglarized when he came into work around 6 a.m. He called the fire chief, who called the sheriff’s office to alert them to the break-in.</p> <p>The station has three ‘apparatuses’—a water tender, a fire engine and an ambulance.</p> <p>Officials say all three were picked clean. Stolen items include defibrillators, jaws of life, chainsaws, radios, rescue tools and other lifesaving gear.</p> <p>The sheriff’s office says the fire station lost an estimated \$90,000 in equipment, and will be out of service until the items can be found or replaced.</p> <p>Anyone with information on the stolen items or suspects is urged to call Grays Harbor County Dispatch at (360) 533-8765.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Arrest: suspect SR900 rock throwing at cars
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/man-throwing-rocks-cars-sr-900-arrested-renton/281-e51bef64-98d7-4fda-b8ad-5326f46912ad
GIST	<p>RENTON, Wash. — A man suspected of throwing rocks and debris at cars along state Route 900 near Renton was arrested Tuesday morning.</p> <p>The 55-year-old man is accused of causing more than \$2,200 worth of damage, according to the Washington State Patrol (WSP).</p> <p>He was arrested without incident just after 10:30 a.m. near SR 900 and 164th Avenue Southeast, which is outside the Renton city limits. SR 900 is a heavily trafficked roadway connecting Renton and Issaquah.</p> <p>Community members came forward and helped WSP develop probable cause to arrest the man by gathering evidentiary pieces, WSP said. Witnesses positively identified the man and told troopers they saw him throw rocks and debris, which WSP said was “crucial” to the arrest.</p> <p>In the first two weeks of September, WSP said it had received four reports of someone throwing rocks at cars.</p> <p>Danny Engels, who was driving back from a doctor’s appointment in Issaquah on Sept. 13, was one of the victims. Engels said a man threw a rock at his car, smashing the windshield and sending glass onto the passenger seat.</p> <p>“It came out of nowhere,” Engels said at the time. “It literally came out of nowhere.”</p> <p>Engels said he kept driving until he found a safe place to pull over and call 911.</p> <p>The man was arrested on suspicion of second-degree malicious mischief, which is a felony, and reckless endangerment.</p> <p>The man is already facing two other felony charges of disorderly conducts and obstructing a law enforcement officer.</p> <p>Court documents from the King County Prosecutor’s Office show on August 29th troopers responded to reports of a man jumping in front of cars and pointing a handgun at vehicles.</p> <p>Court documents show during the response troopers said he resisted and was ultimately forced to the ground and troopers saw a handgun fall out of his bag.</p> <p>WSP is seeking additional victims or witnesses to these suspected crimes. If you have already not been contacted by a trooper, people are urged to call WSP.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 King Co. approves hate-crime hotline
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/king-county-to-create-new-hotline-for-victims-of-hate-crime/
GIST	<p>King County will create a new community-based, hate-crime hotline to help victims access services more easily, and to improve the county’s data collection on reported crimes motivated by hate and bias.</p> <p>The Stop Hate Hotline is intended to serve as a non-law enforcement reporting system that allows victims to get help through an online portal or on the phone. King County allocated \$150,000 in COVID-19 relief funding last year toward the creation of the reporting system.</p> <p>The Metropolitan King County Council unanimously approved the proposal during its Tuesday meeting.</p>

Victims or family of victims who call the hotline or report a case online will be directed by an operator to community groups and agencies offering culturally sensitive counseling or trauma-informed care.

The county will also use the hotline to track incidents of hate- and bias-motivated crimes that may not necessarily be reported to law enforcement.

“If you go online to report a hate crime in Seattle, you have to go a long ways down before you reach nonprofit [services],” Councilmember Reagan Dunn, who sponsored the proposal, previously told The Seattle Times. “First it’s police, then it’s the FBI reporting hotline.”

Some neighborhood and community organizations already run helplines or provide care for victims of hate crimes, such the [Chinese Information and Service Center](#). But the county hotline could triage calls from residents unsure who or where to turn for resources, Dunn previously told The Times.

In 2020, the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office [filed 49 cases](#) involving hate crimes, compared to 36 cases the previous year. Last year, the office filed 37 cases, and 14 cases have been filed so far this year.

In addition, the county’s Coalition Against Hate and Bias, formed in 2020 to address the rise in hate crimes, recorded nearly 550 incidents over the last two years through its [Hate and Bias Incident Response Survey](#).

According to a report from Seattle Police Department analyzing those incidents, about 55% of cases were motivated by anti-Black bias, about 10% against Asians, 9% against Latinos and 2% against Arabs, said Shikū Wainaina, a member of the coalition, during Tuesday’s meeting.

Community advocates and experts estimate [far more crimes](#) motivated by hate or bias are occurring than those figures suggest. Many [incidents go unreported](#), as some victims are distrustful of law enforcement, fear retribution from the attacker, or may be unsure about or uninterested in reporting.

Building on the efforts of the coalition, the county will now create a work group to begin public outreach, identify successful strategies, and finalize details on the hotline to ensure “any new resources or systems developed are trauma-informed, culturally responsive, accessible and effective as defined by communities experiencing racist incidents and identity-based violence,” said coalition member Debbie Lacy, founder of the [social justice community organization](#) Eastside for All, during the Tuesday meeting.

A progress report on the workgroup’s efforts will be released by May.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	09/27 Seattle Pioneer Square shooting: 1 injured
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-critically-wounded-in-pioneer-square-shooting-seattle-police-say/
GIST	<p>A 27-year-old man was critically injured in a Pioneer Square shooting Tuesday afternoon near City Hall Park, police said.</p> <p>Officers found the man suffering from a gunshot wound around 3:20 p.m. after responding to reports of a shooting on Third Avenue and Yesler Way, the Seattle Police Department said in a blotter post.</p> <p>Seattle Fire Department medics took the man to Harborview Medical Center.</p> <p>Witnesses told police the shooting suspect fled. No arrests had been made Tuesday evening.</p> <p>Homicide detectives are investigating the shooting — a common practice when someone is critically hurt, said Detective Valerie Carson, a police spokesperson.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 Escape: serving life for deadly bombing
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/prisons-las-vegas-nevada-immigration-bombings-eba4c7bc2913e0173ca25b166505c7ab
GIST	<p>LAS VEGAS (AP) — Authorities were searching Tuesday for a 42-year-old convicted bombmaker who escaped from a Nevada prison where he was serving a life sentence for a deadly 2007 explosion outside a Las Vegas Strip resort.</p> <p>Gov. Steve Sisolak ordered an investigation into the incident after he said late Tuesday his office learned the escapee had been missing from the medium-security prison since early in the weekend.</p> <p>“This is unacceptable,” Sisolak said in a statement.</p> <p>Officials didn’t realize until Tuesday morning Porfirio Duarte-Herrera was missing during a head count at Southern Desert Correctional Center near Las Vegas. A state Department of Corrections statement said search teams were looking for him.</p> <p>Duarte-Herrera, from Nicaragua, was convicted in 2010 of killing a hot dog stand vendor using a motion-activated bomb in a coffee cup atop a car parked at the Luxor hotel-casino.</p> <p>Records show his co-defendant, Omar Rueda-Denvers, remained in custody Tuesday. The 47-year-old from Guatemala is serving a life sentence at a different Nevada prison for murder, attempted murder, explosives and other charges.</p> <p>A Clark County District Court jury spared both men from the death penalty in the slaying of Willebaldo Dorantes Antonio, whom prosecutors identified as the boyfriend of Rueda-Denvers’ ex-girlfriend.</p> <p>Prosecutors said jealousy was the motive for the attack on the top deck of a two-story parking structure. The blast initially raised fears of a terrorist attack on the Strip.</p> <p>Officials described Duarte-Herrera as 5 feet, 4 inches tall and 135 pounds, with brown eyes and brown hair.</p> <p>Sisolak said his office ordered corrections officials to “conduct and complete a thorough investigation into this event as quickly as possible.”</p> <p>“This kind of security lapse cannot be permitted and those responsible will be held responsible,” he said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	09/27 High school football players shot, 1 dead
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/high-school-football-players-shot-dead-philly-drive/story?id=90602219
GIST	<p>A 14-year-old is dead and four other high school football players were wounded after gunfire erupted behind a Philadelphia high school Tuesday afternoon, police said.</p> <p>The five unidentified victims were walking off the field after a scrimmage at Roxborough High School around 4:41 p.m. when someone in a green Ford Explorer drove up to the players and began shooting, police said.</p> <p>The victims were transported to Temple University Hospital and Einstein Medical Center, according to police.</p> <p>The deceased 14-year-old was shot once in the chest, police said.</p>

Return to Top	<p>A 17-year-old male victim was shot in the arm and leg, a 14-year-old male victim was shot once in the thigh and a 15-year-old was shot once in the leg, according to investigators. All three are listed in stable condition.</p> <p>Deputy Philly Police Commissioner John Stanford said that all the players shot were from Roxborough High School and that the shooters left the scene on foot.</p> <p>There are several cameras in the area where police will pull the footage, Stanford said.</p> <p>"Death is final. You don't come back from that," Stanford said when asked on what parents can say to their kids.</p> <p>The police didn't immediately release information on the fifth victim.</p> <p>There are no arrests and no suspects have been identified.</p> <p>The high school released a statement later in the evening on its website informing parents about the situation.</p> <p>"We are aware of a shooting that occurred at a football scrimmage this afternoon in Roxborough. Four students have been taken to local hospitals, and families of the four shooting victims are being contacted. Multiple Philadelphia officers are at the scene, as well as members from our Office of School Safety. We will update you as more information is available," the statement read.</p>
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[Return to Top](#)